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The Bootblack Stowaway; or, Broadway Billy's Blind.

BY J. C. COWDRICK,

AUTHOR OF THE "BROADWAY BILLY" NOVELS, "THE DETECTIVE APPRENTICE," ETC., ETC.



"A FORTUNE PICKED UP IN A SINGLE SUMMER—I AM YOUR MAN, MR. CONNINGHAM."

The Bootblack Stowaway;

OR,

BROADWAY BILLY'S BLIND.

Secret of the Banker's Buried Booty.

BY J. C. COWDRICK,

AUTHOR OF THE "BROADWAY BILLY" NOVELS.

CHAPTER I.

PLANNING A STRANGE VOYAGE.

As the day was warm, the skylight of the cabin had been removed entirely, and while the two men sat at the table consulting over a chart, a third was peering down upon them through the opening.

One of the two in the cabin was a solid-looking man of forty, or maybe a little younger, with a full beard, and was clad in the uniform of a steamship officer. The other was a deformed man, a hunchback, with smooth face, younger than his companion by ten years.

"What is your position worth to you, Captain Elliott?" the hunchback inquired.

"Twenty four hundred dollars a year, Mr. Cunningham," was the thoughtful response.

"And how many years of service do you think you are good for yet?"

"Maybe twenty, barring everything that would be unfavorable, sir."

"Exactly; twenty years of wind and weather, to gain what I am willing to give you for a few months' work."

The other started.

"I mean it," the hunchback assured.

"Engage with me, and I will give you an even fifty thousand dollars for the work you are to do. Here is your twenty years' pay in a lump; and more."

"I'll do it!"

"That is what I wanted to hear you say, sir. Hand in your resignation to the steamship company at once, and come immediately and take charge of this yacht. I could have found other men, but you are the man I want. No going back on your word."

"No; I'll not go back on that. I have one condition to propose, however, which is only fair to myself."

"Name it, Captain Elliott."

"I must have half of this money in advance, to deposit for the benefit of my family in case anything should happen to me."

"Well, to secure your service, I'll grant it. I'll give you my check now. The other half is to be paid as soon as the work is successfully accomplished and you are dismissed."

"That is satisfactory, Mr. Cunningham."

The hunchback took a check-book from his pocket, and using a fountain pen, wrote a check for the sum named and handed it across the table.

"You see I am dealing fair with you," he said. "All I ask is fair dealing in return."

"And you shall have it, sir."

The fingers of the sea-captain trembled slightly as he folded the check and put it in his pocket. It represented more money than he had earned in the past dozen years—his pay had been smaller than now.

"There is one thing which remains to be settled."

"Yes, I want to know all about this voyage, where I am going and what I am going for."

"I did not refer to that when I spoke, Captain Elliott, but that will be talked over too. The thing I want understood is, that you are to keep this business forever secret."

"I can afford to do that, sir."

"But, do you swear that you will do it?"

"I do; I swear it."

"That is enough. I have known you for

many years, and I have never had reason to doubt your word."

The face that was looking down upon them expressed keen interest.

"Well, about the voyage?" the captain urged.

"Yes, about the voyage, now. Do you see this small island marked here, Captain Elliott?"

The hunchback indicated with his finger a spot on the chart, and the captain was quick to respond that he did see it.

"I have never been there," he added, "but I know what it is: a barren, desolate bunch of rocks, and nothing more. What on earth do you want to go there for?"

"We go there for our cargo."

The captain leaned back in his chair and stared at the hunchback as though to question his sanity.

"Your cargo?" he repeated.

"Exactly."

"And what is the cargo?"

"That, Captain Elliott, you are never to know."

The captain's face became more surprised than ever, and he knew not what to say, evidently. He simply stared until the hunchback spoke again.

"You are never to know," the latter repeated. "You are to go there, take in a cargo which you will find awaiting you, bring the yacht safely back to New York, and your duty is done."

"I don't like such business as that, though, Mr. Cunningham. I always like to know the secrets of my vessel."

"You cannot know in this instance."

"I am half inclined not to accept, after all—"

"Think of the price you are to get—and half of it in your pocket this minute. Think of—"

"See here, Conrad Cunningham, is this voyage an honest one?"

"Strictly so, Captain Elliott."

"Then why should it be a secret one?"

"Captain Elliott, the plainest kind of talk is necessary just here. The secret, whatever it is, is mine only, and is not to be shared with anybody. I wanted a trustworthy captain, and you are the man I fixed upon. I am paying you a fortune for a simple piece of work; but not so much for that as for your silence afterward. Now, do you question further?"

The captain was thoughtful, biting his short mustache while he meditated.

"You say the voyage is an honest one?" he questioned again.

"Strictly so, I repeat," was the answer.

"We are to sail openly, and openly return. It is to appear merely as a pleasure voyage."

"But, your cargo; that can be no secret when we reach port."

"We go out light, and return the same, so far as concerns appearances. Our cargo will not be seen."

"Then we are to smuggle?"

"It might be called that, maybe; but, no one will ever know."

"How about the crew? You certainly cannot keep the secret from them; and if you are going to buy their silence, I cannot undertake the voyage."

"Captain Elliott, I could have engaged a dishonest man for this business, had I chosen to do so, and he would never have questioned as you do; but, it was an honest man I wanted."

"That is not the point."

"The point is, I trust no one but you. Not one of our crew will ever know what is taken aboard the yacht at that island. A sleeping potion will render them oblivious to everything while we are taking in the cargo, and when they awake it will be safely stowed away."

"Do you assure me that no trouble can come of this?"

"I guarantee you against everything of

that kind, captain. You yourself will know nothing whatever of the secret, and I alone can be held responsible. But, nothing will ever be known; never fear."

"How about getting your secret cargo ashore?"

"It will not be taken on shore, at any rate not for awhile; I will attend to all that myself."

"But, the customs officers; how do you expect to avoid them? They may or may not take it into their heads to board you upon your return. This voyage cannot be made in a day."

"Let them come aboard, if they want to; they will find nothing but a little ballast, same as now. As I told you, we go out light and return the same."

"Well, it is all a mystery to me, Mr. Cunningham."

"And it always will be, Captain Elliott."

From biting his mustache, the captain had taken to tugging at it with his fingers, and it was plain that a conflict was going on within his breast.

He was silent for some time.

"What is your decision?" the hunchback finally demanded.

"You have had that," was the measured reply. "I was only thinking whether I had not better withdraw."

"I cannot compel you to serve me, certainly. If you do not care to do so, give me back my check, and with it your word of honor that you will never breathe one syllable of what has passed between us here."

"The temptation is too great," the captain rejoined, now firmly. "It is the chance of my life and I dare not refuse. A fortune picked up in a single summer—I am your man, Mr. Cunningham. I will resign my present employ immediately, and in three days will come on board the Gauntlet and take command."

"Your hand on it."

They clasped hands across the table, and the bargain was sealed.

"Respecting a crew," the hunchback then went on to say, "you may take full charge of that. Ship as many men as necessary for absolute safety, for we cannot afford to take a single risk."

"Have you no engineer?"

"No; I bought this yacht for this especial purpose; the engineer of my other pleasure yacht, the Peer, has been handling her for me."

"I see. Well, I will undertake the matter, Mr. Cunningham, and you are aware that I do not turn back when once I put my hand to a thing. When do you expect to sail?"

"Just as soon as you can get ready."

"Very well; on the third day from this we will drop out with the ebb and steam away."

"That is good, Captain Elliott; I am well satisfied with my bargain and the arrangements. All I ask is, do not fail me, for I have more at stake in this than you would dream possible."

"I believe you, for I do not think you are crazy."

"Serve me well, and you will never regret it, Captain Elliott, is all I can say. I am far from crazy, believe me."

The remainder of their talk would be of no interest, for it concerned only arrangements in detail, and finally, after a parting glass of wine at a sideboard, they ascended to the deck.

Barely had their backs turned and their feet struck the steps, when a pair of legs came dangling down through the open skylight, and as the heads of the hunchback and Captain Elliott emerged above deck, the man who had been listening dropped lightly to the table.

There it was but the work of a moment for him to snatch up the chart which had been left on the table and get it into his

pocket. That done, he took some other papers out of a drawer in the table which the hunchback had left unlocked and open. Then he waited, until the hunchback, having parted with his captain, was heard coming down the steps, when the fellow gave a light spring, caught himself over the coping of the opening, and was gone.

CHAPTER II.

A SCHEME AND A SHADOW.

"JUPETY JUPE!" exclaimed the street Arab "Ticket," but now known as Broadway Billy, Junior,* as something out of the usual claimed his attention. "I have got my awful eye on ye, me ducky, and if this ain't a case fer my namesake I miss my guess. I reckon I'll git onto your haze, an' see what you have been up to, anyhow."

Without delaying a moment he set forth after the object of his aroused suspicions.

The boy, in all his array of rags and patches, and with his bootblack's box slung over his shoulder, had sauntered idly out upon one of the piers for a breath of river air.

A beautiful steam yacht was lying alongside the pier, and he stopped to admire her. Two men had just stepped ashore, one a mild-faced hunchback and the other a thick-set, bearded man wearing a uniform of blue with gilt buttons, and they stopped on the edge of the pier to talk.

They were there but a few moments, when, after shaking hands, they parted, the man in the uniform walking rapidly away and the hunchback returning aboard the yacht.

There he paused for a moment, looking first at the retreating form of the man who had just left him, and then admiringly at the pretty craft, of which Billy Junior rightly guessed he was the owner; when he turned and slowly descended the steps leading into the cabin.

Then it was that the mentioned "something out of the usual" took place, causing the street Arab to break forth in the language quoted.

A fellow in sailor's attire leaped lightly up through the open skylight in the top of the cabin, turned half a handspring and landed upon his feet like a cat, and was up on the pier and away before any one could have detained him.

Without delaying a moment, as said, Broadway Billy, Junior, was after him, not to try to stop him or to call attention to him, but to play the shadow and learn what his action meant.

"I'll bet my dinner he's been liftin' that hunchback gent's watch, or somethin' like that, an' if he has he'll find he has run plump up against Broadway Billy's combine," the boy further muttered. "Don't expect ter take him in myself, but I bet he don't git away from me jest the same."

The sailor had not noticed the boy, on leaving the yacht in such haste, and even had he done so, could never have suspected him for the able little detective he really was.

As soon as the man reached the street he mingled with the crowd, and moved along down the river front.

No one could suspect the trick he had just performed; nor would any one imagine that the patched and ragged urchin coming along a little distance behind was shadowing him.

The sailor had not gone far when he met another wearing the same style of hat and jacket as himself, proving that they were or had been messmates aboard the same craft; and when they stopped, the one Billy Junior was following drew the other to the edge of the sidewalk.

Where they had met the sign of a cheap eating-house stood on the edge of the curb, a double, tent-like thing of light material on a framework about two feet wide by three times as many in height, and Ticket the

Trump—to give him his old name for the nonce—was under it with the quickness of a rat and prepared to take in whatever might be said.

He had caught the names of the pair as they greeted each other, and knew that the name of the one he had followed was Mark; the other's was Tom.

"You have found a berth, mate," the one called Tom observed. "I kin see it in your face."

"You're off your reckonin' this time, Tom; I ain't found no berth, but I have found somethin' else that may be a good deal better, if it don't slip its hawser fore I kin make it fast."

"What is it? What ye talkin' about?"

"When have ye see Cap'n Trucker? Tell me that first, fer I'm most anxious to find him."

"I seen him not two hours ago; went around to see if he has got a ship yet, or any berth, thinkin' to ship with him, but he hadn't, so I'm still tuggin' at my anchor, an' likely to keep on tuggin', I'm afeard."

"But, where is he?"

"Round at Smithkin's boardin'-house."

"All right; we'll tack off in that direction, Tom."

"But, mate, ye haven't told me what it is ye've sighted," the other reminded.

"Don't know what it is m'self, yet, Tom," the rejoinder; "but it is somethin' worth tryin' fer, and don't you fail to put that down in your log. It's a big mystery, I tell ye."

"Yes, but ye *ain't* tellin' me; you are worse 'n a dead calm to a sail-craft an' the cap'n in a hurry."

"Well, I'll give it to ye close-hauled, an' then we'll wear off an' find the cap'n. I think he'll know what to make of it, if we don't; it may mean a berth fer us both."

"I hope so, anyhow."

"You know I have been keepin' a sort o' lookout on the Gauntlet ever since Humpback bought her and we all got our walkin'-papers, for I wanted to know what he was goin' to do with her; an' now I've found out."

"Hoy! Is that so?"

"True as preachin'. She's up here at a pier, coaled an' provisioned for a long trip, an' now Humpback has shipped a new cap'n and in three days they are to steam out—that is, if nothin' happens; but I'm of the opinion that somethin' *will* happen."

"What do you mean?"

"I think when I tell Cap'n Trucker what I know, he will take a hand in, and maybe they won't find no Gauntlet when they git ready."

"*Whew!*"

"That's what I mean, Tom, fast as tar an' pitch. This new captain is to be paid fifty thousing dollars fer this one trip—*think of it!* An' it is to be a secret smug-glin' v'y'ge."

"Sounds like the stories a feller reads 'bout them old-time prizers, don't it?"

"You are right, Tom. But, I am up to 'em. I have got their chart an' papers, an' we'll go right off an' see Trucker an' let him figger on the whole thing. Come along with ye, mate."

Mark gave a tug at his companion's arm as he spoke, and set off, the other going with him promptly.

The Arab, Ticket, was out from between the sides of the sign in an instant and after them. His eyes were flashing with interest fully aroused, and he meant to know about this matter if possible.

"By Jupe!" he exclaimed under his breath, "but it's growin' a trifle interestin' now. I must see it out, if I rip a patch or two tryin'. Guess the Broadway Billy fever is gettin' holt on me, the way I feel. Goin' to steal a steam yacht, are they? I think we'll have somethin' to say about that, me hearties."

Ticket grinned, taking an extra hitch at his one apology for a suspender as if thus girding on his armor for the fray.

It was impossible for him to overhear the further talk of the two sailors as they elbowed their way along the crowded streets, and their conversation had little interest for us, Mark simply telling his messmate what he had heard and seen on board the Gauntlet.

Their destination was a sailors' boarding-house kept by one Niles Smithkin, on one of the streets near the river front on which such establishments abound.

Smithkin's house was neither worse nor better than many others of its kind, perhaps. There was a saloon on the ground, with a mess-room at the rear, and above were numerous sleeping cubby-holes.

Billy Junior waited a few minutes after the two sailors had entered the den, so as not to give rise to the suspicion that he had been following them, and then boldly sauntered in with as much independence as though he carried New York in his pocket.

He immediately espied the two men he had followed, in conversation with a third, a squat, square-jawed, square-shouldered individual with a short, bristling mustache, whose appearance on the whole was that of a particularly hard man; and at sight of him the young street Arab felt a sensation of fear creep up his back.

It was only momentary, however, for the boy's past rough experience had made him really afraid of nothing.

"Well, kid, what do you want here?" a rough voice sung out.

It was Smithkin who spoke, and Billy Junior, on looking, saw him leaning over the bar and eying him critically.

"Does John Brown the Sailor live here, sir?" the boy asked, with pretended timidity.

"Mebby he does," was the response, with a wink at some men who stood near the bar. "What do you want with John Brown?"

"He's goin' to take me on his ship, sir. He told me to come here and wait fer him, and he would take me and make a midshipman of me, sir. If he ain't here, I'm to wait."

There was a roar of laughter from those who heard this, and the boy was looked upon with half pity, half amusement, on the part of some.

"That's purty good, that is!" declared Smithkin. "Mebby you paid John Brown somethin' to git the berth fer ye; did ye?"

Billy Junior looked surprised at this.

"How did you know?" he innocently asked.

This raised another laugh, and while it was still ringing, the young Arab advanced further into the room and sat down.

The trio in whom he was interested had paid no attention to him, being evidently too much interested in their own affairs, and they had now taken seats and Mark had given the stolen papers into the hands of the hard-looking man.

Seeing no good advantage to get near enough to overhear, now that attention had been so openly called to himself, the boy had to be satisfied with watching, and as the hard-looking man examined the papers which had been put into his possession, a look of keenest interest appeared on his face.

Leaning over the table toward Mark, he engaged him in conversation which lasted fully an hour, referring now and then to the papers. He finally ordered something to drink, and the three proceeded to make merry over a plan which had evidently been fixed upon, whatever it might be; and no notice having been taken of the Arab by any one for some time, he ventured to draw nearer to where the men sat.

This Captain Trucker, as he had learned

his name to be, was now his especial game since the stolen papers had passed into his keeping.

CHAPTER III.

VERA STAFFORD'S STORY.

It was on this same summer day that a lady entered the office of the young metropolitan detective, Billy Weston.

She was young, good-looking, and richly attired, and had the air of one born into good society. There was a troubled look upon her fair face, however, and Broadway Billy knew at a glance she had come seeking his professional service.

"Do I address Mr. Weston?" she sweetly asked, as Billy rose to greet her.

"You do, madam," Billy politely answered. "May I invite you to take a chair? You will find it cooler here by the window."

She took the seat indicated, and Billy resuming his own chair by the desk, awaited her pleasure.

"I have come to you for help, Mr. Weston," she proceeded immediately to explain. "Still, I don't know whether the service I require is in your line of business or not."

"Let me hear what it is, madam, and I can decide that point."

"I will tell you: A dear friend of mine is in danger, and I want him protected for a day or two."

"Maybe I can serve you; I must have the full particulars, however, if I am to be of much use in the emergency. Who is this friend of whom you speak?"

"It is Mr. Conrad Cunningham, who is—I suppose I must be explicit—who is my accepted lover. He has a rival, a dangerous man, I am afraid, since he has threatened desperate things."

"Yet you say you need my protection for Mr. Cunningham for only a day or two?"

"That is all, sir. He expects to go to sea in his steam yacht, for a voyage, and when he has safely departed your work will be done."

"Who is this foe—this rival?"

"His name is Elson Longdale, sir."

"And, pardon me, your own name is—"

"Vera Stafford."

"Thank you. Will you tell me still more about the matter, Miss Stafford, so that I may have a full understanding of it all around?"

"I scarcely know what further you desire, Mr. Weston."

"Well, I must have the addresses of these men, as well as your own, and I ought to know what manner of men they are, and what threats Mr. Longdale has made. The more you tell me the better I shall be able to serve you."

The young lady gave the addresses required, and said further:

"As to the threat, Mr. Weston, Elson Longdale has taken a horrible oath that Conrad shall never marry me, and I am sure he means it. I could not wed him, for I never liked him, but he has the idea that if Conrad were out of the way I would consent to become his wife."

"Can you describe these men to me, Miss Stafford?"

"Certainly, sir; or at any rate I will attempt it. Mr. Cunningham is a deformed man, being a hunchback, but what he lacks in personal appearance he makes up in beauty of character. He has a full, mild face, with large brown eyes, and wears no beard. He cannot be called good-looking, and yet he is far from being really homely, as I see him."

Billy inclined his head.

"And the other, Mr. Longdale?" he inquired.

"He is called a handsome man, and I suppose he is. He is tall, graceful and splendidly formed, and people wonder how I can pass him by for Mr. Cunningham; but, if the latter is deformed in body, Mr. Long-

dale is no less deformed in character, and I prefer Mr. Cunningham with all his deformity to Elson Longdale with his perfect form yet tarnished moral quality. The contrast, outwardly, is what makes Mr. Longdale all the more bitter."

"What of the threat he has made? What is it?"

"Why, just what I have told you; he has taken a horrible oath that Conrad and I shall never wed; that I shall not throw myself away upon that hunchback—as he disrespectfully calls him. I greatly fear he means to kill Conrad, if he can, or in some way remove him. Oh! you can protect him—you will protect him, Mr. Weston?"

"I will endeavor to do so, Miss Stafford. By the way, do you expect to go to sea with Mr. Cunningham?"

"Oh, no, sir!"

"Pardon my asking, but I thought maybe you intended marrying immediately, and this was to be the honeymoon excursion; I know most brides expect a little jaunt out into the world after the knot has been tied, before they settle down for the lifetime jog in domestic harness."

Billy spoke in his pleasing, droll way, his handsome eyes twinkling, and the young lady smiled as she listened.

"Oh, no; you are wrong in your guess, sir," she made response. "Mr. Cunningham is going alone, and really I do not know where he is going, or why."

"That seems strange, seeing that you are his bride to be."

"So I think, too; but he declines to tell me; says he cannot do so, and has begged me not to urge him."

"And you fully trust him?"

"Oh, yes; Conrad is the soul of honor, sir."

"Do you think it is possible that his rival can be at the bottom of his going?"

"Do you know, that same thought came to me, and I asked Conrad; but he said no, it was impossible; that Elson could not possibly know anything about his intention of going to sea."

"Do you know where he is going?"

"I do not."

"Or how long he will be gone?"

"He will be absent several weeks, so he has told me."

"There is something behind this, Miss Stafford, I am sure, for it is an unusual proceeding on the part of such a man as you have described Mr. Cunningham to be. There is certainly something back of it."

"Again you think as I do, Mr. Weston; this is a matter that has troubled me not a little. I have tried to get Conrad to tell me all about it, but he says he positively cannot do so; it is a secret, he says, which must be forever locked in his own breast; that it is something I must never know."

"Worse and worse. But, this is nothing to me, since you do not want me to pry into his secret; you want me merely to protect his life until he has safely sailed away."

"Yes, that is all; and yet— But, that is all, Mr. Weston."

"I will attend to it, then. I will have him followed and watched over from now until the time of his departure."

"That question of yours, Mr. Weston; do you think it possible that Mr. Longdale can be at the bottom of it all? You cannot understand how anxious I am about it, and yet—"

"No, madam, I do not think so, now, since you say your lover declares it to be impossible. But, as I said, there is something very strange back of it, and it may so happen that— But, there, what is the use of idle speculation?"

"What were you about to say?"

"Well, I was going to add that events might so come around as to throw this secret into my possession, since I am to have Mr. Cunningham under my eye for a time,

and for that reason I hardly know whether I ought to serve you or not—"

"Yes, yes; you must serve me, Mr. Weston; I have the greatest confidence in you, and I want to protect Conrad. Whatever you learn, keep it locked in your own breast and never reveal it to a living soul."

"Certainly, so far as that goes, Miss Stafford; but I had not quite done. If this secret happens to be something of a criminal nature, what then? You know I am a detective—"

The young woman had paled for a second, but the next moment she smiled, as she interrupted:

"You do not know Conrad Cunningham as I know him, sir, or you would never suspect anything of that sort," with all confidence in her tone. "Were all the world to declare him guilty, I would still believe in his innocence."

"Guilty of what?"

It was a thrust by which Billy hoped to surprise a disclosure, if the young woman was holding anything back.

"Of anything that might be charged against him, no matter what, sir," with all frankness. "Unfortunate man that he is, Mr. Cunningham is the prince of honor, and nothing could shake my faith in him."

Broadway Billy saw that she was sincere, and there was nothing further to be said.

The young woman took her leave.

When she had gone Broadway Billy tapped a tiny bell on his desk, and the door leading into an adjoining room opened and his two able aides, Happy Harry and Silent Seth came into the office.

"What is it, boss?" eagerly demanded the impulsive Harry. "Is it a new case for us to bend our brains to? I hope so, for here we have been two whole days without a tap of work to do, and I feel as rusty as any old cheese-knife. Can't stand it if somethin' don't—"

"Cork right up, sir!" Billy ordered. "That tongue of yours will never get a chance to rust, that is certain. I have work for you and Seth, and I want you to set about it immediately."

"Hooray!" cried Harry. "How does that strike you, Silent Shadower?"

He gave Seth a playful slap on the shoulder, but the imperturbable Seth showed no interest whatever, only waiting for instructions.

"It will be something new for you both," Billy went on to say. "You, Seth, are to play the guardian over a certain man whose name and address I will give you, and you, Harry, are to keep an eye upon his foe to see that he does not harm him. It will be for a couple of days only."

Harry's face dropped.

"That will be rather tame sort o' work," he complained.

"It may or it may not; I am inclined to think there is going to be some excitement before you get through with it."

Their chief then went on to give them such an understanding of the matter as they needed, and having received their instructions the two beagles set out on their still hunt. Even Billy had no idea of the magnitude of the work his aids and himself were to perform in this apparently commonplace case.

CHAPTER IV.

AN UNEXPECTED DANGER.

THE gamin, Ticket, when he had moved nearer to where Captain Trucker and his companions were seated, in the saloon where we left him, found he was able to catch a word now and then of what was being said.

He had by this time come to feel quite at home in the place, and the proprietor being kept busy most of the time, he had not been further questioned, and in fact little if any further notice had been taken of him after the first remarks upon his entering.

Eager to hear more, he edged along on a bench that stood by the wall, near the end of which was the table where the trio of suspects were sitting.

Inch by inch he moved, till finally he could have touched Captain Trucker had he desired.

Now he had command of what was being said almost as fully as though he was one of the party himself.

"You never did a better stroke of work in your life, Mark Welch," was the first complete remark he got hold of. "You and Tom get the old crew together, if you can find them, and we'll make the venture. We'll board the yacht this very night, and be off."

Billy Junior's heart gave a great leap.

The next moment it gave another and greater still, when a temptation was put in his way.

As he concluded speaking, Captain Trucker thrust the papers into the outside pocket of his jacket on that side nearest to where the urchin detective was sitting, as if inviting him to take them.

This the little Arab fairly itched to do, but he hesitated.

He knew who had the papers, and by keeping him in sight, the papers could not really be lost, and he would in some way bring about their recovery.

"Good fer you, cap'n!" one of the sailors meantime had exclaimed. "We are with ye, heart an' soul, in this thing, sure's my name's Tom Sand."

"Right ye be, messmate," Mark Welch echoed. "Come along an' we'll hunt up the boys, if we kin find 'em, an' when we tell 'em what is in the wind, I'll bet they'll ship fast enough."

The two rose from their chairs.

"You must be back here by ten sharp to-night," Captain Trucker reminded.

"Don't you fear but we'll be on hand, cap'n," was the response. "We understand the hull thing as plain as the compass."

They turned away with that, and as they did so the hard-looking captain rose from his seat, after gulping down the remaining liquor in his glass, and moved over in the direction of the bar.

He stopped for a moment to speak to Smithkin, after which he sauntered to the door and out.

Ticket remained in his place as if turned to stone.

The papers the captain had put in his pocket lay on the floor at his feet!

With one foot he had moved his bootblack's box so as to conceal them from sight.

The papers being folded long, and the pocket of the man's jacket being shallow, just a touch under the edge of the table as he rose from his chair had turned them out, and he had never noticed it.

No sooner had the man passed out the door than Billy Junior stooped and flipped the papers into his box, and rising, with the same motion, flung the box over his shoulder and made for the door. While he had hesitated about taking the papers out of the man's pocket, he did not hesitate over this chance for recovering lost property.

"Hillo!" the proprietor called out to him, as he passed the bar. "Not going, are ye, sonny?"

"Yes, I'm goin'," the Arab answered, in tone of disgust. "I don't believe John Brown is comin' here a tall, I don't; I think he's fooled me."

"Well, yes, I think so, too; somebody has played ye fer a sucker, my boy, and that's all there is about it. You'll know more after you have cut your wisdom teeth 'n what ye do now."

Billy Junior made some response in a half-muttered way, but did not pause in his march toward the door.

He looked up and down the street the moment he passed out, and saw Trucker only a

few steps away talking with a good-looking man whom he had evidently just met, and taking the opposite direction, the Arab made off as fast as he could go.

On leaving the place, Captain Trucker had come face to face with this man before going a dozen paces, and the man had stopped him.

"The very person I am looking for, Captain Trucker," he cried, catching hold of the captain's arm.

"Ha! is it you, Mr. Longdale?" the captain responded, and he offered his hand in the most friendly manner.

"Nobody else, I assure you," as they shook hands. "I hunted up the Gauntlet to find you, and to my amazement learned she has been sold and you and all the crew discharged."

"That's the way it stands, Mr. Longdale, we're all ashore and the yacht is in other hands."

"But, why in the world did Hewson part with her?"

"Why, he bet so heavy on that last fight, and lost, that I guess he was glad to let her go. He's one of the boys, you know."

"Yes, I know he is. But, who owns the Gauntlet now?"

"A man named Conningham, a hunchback."

"The dickens!"

"Why does that surprise you?"

"Because I know the man, and I know he already has one steam yacht. I can't imagine what he can want with another."

The captain smiled, as far as his hard face was capable of taking on a smile, but he said nothing. He knew the reason, and it was one which it was to his interest to keep close.

"What did you want to see me for?" he asked.

"It's all up, now, if you are out of the Gauntlet. I had a piece of work I wanted you to do, that's all."

"Let's step into Smithkin's here and have a chat. It may not be all up, for I have a little job of my own on hand and it is possible I can work them both together. We'll see—Great hurricanes!"

"What's the matter?"

"My papers!"

The captain had put his hand to his jacket pocket as he spoke, his words reminding him of the papers, and great was his surprise to find them gone.

He hastily scanned the sidewalk, and not finding them, left his companion and ran back to the saloon, dashing in and going to the table where he had been talking with the two sailors so shortly before.

Longdale followed him, and entered the door just as Trucker cried out:

"I say, Smithkin!"

"Well, what's the matter, Cap'n Trucker?" the proprietor asked, giving his attention at once.

"Did you see anything of some folded papers here after I went out? I had 'em in this pocket while I was sittin' here, but now they're gone."

"No, ain't seen 'em."

Then it was that the captain began to storm and swear in a thoroughly piratical fashion, and if swearing could turn things blue, as is sometimes farcically said, things in that saloon would have assumed a decidedly azure tint.

But, all his swearing availed nothing; the papers were gone, and he could not guess how, when or where he had lost them.

He had to accept the theory that some one had taken them out of his pocket on the street.

At last when he was calm enough to approach, Longdale spoke to him.

"Well, they seem to be gone, captain," he said, "so what are you going to do about it? Come, let's sit down and have a chat, as you said. You thought maybe you could help me—"

"Yes, but dash upon dash, man, you don't understand it! I'd have given up my life sooner than give up those papers. If I could be sure they were destroyed, that would be different; but not knowing where they are is what worries me. I'd give my right hand, almost, to get hold of them."

"That don't help the matter a bit; they are gone."

"Yes, curse the luck."

The captain dropped upon a chair in a heartless way, as if he little cared what might happen now.

"Yes, I wanted to see you," Longdale brought the talk back to his own interests; "but with the Gauntlet out of the question I don't see how you can be of any use to me—"

"The Gauntlet isn't out of the question," the captain growled, being in just the right frame of mind to be reckless.

"Not out of the question? What do you mean, Trucker?"

"I could steal her in an hour, if I wanted her."

"Ha! But, you wouldn't dare do it."

"You don't know me, Elson Longdale, I dare do anything, and that would be a mighty small matter."

"Say, then," in a low and cautious tone, "would a thousand dollars in hand be any inducement for you to steal her and take a little ocean excursion in her?"

"What d'ye mean?"

"Exactly what I say."

"Yes, it would. I'm in the mood for anything desperate. You show me the color of a thousand dollars, and I'm your man."

"It's a bargain! You are the very man I want for the business, for I know I can fully trust you, once you have undertaken it for me. If you'll do it, I'll give you the thousand dollars cash down."

"I'm your man; say on."

"This man you have mentioned, this Conningham, is a fellow I bitterly hate, and it seems I am going to be able to deal him a double blow. We both love a certain young lady, and she is determined to throw herself away upon this hunchback, while I am as determined she shall not."

"Now, the matter is just this: I am going to steal her, take her away to sea, and force her to marry me whether she will or not. It is harsh measures, but she will thank me for it when she comes to her senses afterward. And, if I can take her in Conningham's own yacht, so much the greater my revenge upon the hateful hunchback. Now, what do you say to it?"

Captain Trucker leaned over the table, laid a firm grasp upon the other's arm, and hoarsely whispered:

"Give me the thousand, and have the girl on the dock at midnight."

CHAPTER V.

WHAT IS HIS SECRET?

CONRAD CONNINGHAM, returning to the cabin of the Gauntlet after parting with Captain Elliott, advanced to the table and had actually put out his hand to take up the chart he had left lying there before he perceived it was gone.

He gave a start, and his eyes quickly swept the chairs, the floor, and in fact the whole cabin, in search of it.

"Gone!" he gasped, turning pale.

For the moment he seemed dazed, and pressed his hand to his forehead.

"Is it possible Captain Elliott took it?" he asked himself, half aloud. "No, I know he did not," answering the query immediately; "it was lying here as we went out, and he was ahead of me."

The drawer in the table was open about as he had left it, and he sprang to look in that, as a sudden fear seemed to seize him.

"My God!" he cried, the instant he looked, and he sunk down upon a chair. "A thief has been here! The papers are gone,

and I would have given up my life sooner than lose them."

With a groan he allowed his head to sink upon his breast, and thus he remained for several seconds.

Suddenly he roused up, springing to his feet.

"Who took them?" he cried. "There was certainly no one on board the yacht, and positively there was no one here in the cabin. How were those papers spirited away in so short a time? I must notify the police immediately— But, I dare not go to the police with it! What am I to do?"

The expression of his face was one of keenest despair.

"What am I to do?" he repeated over and over again. "Who has taken them from me? No man living knew I had such papers in my possession; not a soul shared the secret with my father. I cannot understand it. Ha! is it possible that some one was listening? If so, all is lost—lost!"

He looked up at the open skylight above the table, and from that sprung to examine the top of the table more closely.

"It is true—true!" he cried. "Some one listened, heard all that was planned, and has stolen the papers! All is lost. There is but one thing to do and that is to start as quickly as possible— But, how can I find what I seek without the papers to guide me? Great heavens! what am I to do? I certainly must not idle away time here, but must see Elliott again immediately."

On the top of the table he had discovered the marks of feet, and it was easy to understand, then, how the papers had been stolen and how the thief had entered and left the cabin.

Searching yet once again, even through all his pockets, though he had been so sure where the papers had been, he finally left the cabin, put the skylight in place, returned and secured it inside, then locked the cabin and left the yacht.

Men were busily engaged further along the dock, and he approached and called to one of them.

"Did you see any one leaving that yacht a few minutes ago, my man?" he asked.

"Oi did thot, sor," was the broad Milesian reply. "Oi saw a ragged little divil av a bootblack makin' thracks away from dhere not foive minutes ago."

"Had he anything in his hands?"

"Oi did not see dhat he had, sor, but he had a box slung on one shoulder av him, loike any other little imp av his koinde, sor."

"Thank you, my man."

"Has anyt'ing been taken from dhe boat, sor?"

"Yes, some very valuable papers have been stolen, and I would willingly give a hundred dollars for their recovery."

"Begob! an' it's mesel' dhat would loike to be afther recovering av dhem fur ye, sor, and av Oi see dhe little spalpeen around here again Oi'll foind out phwhether he took dhem or not."

"All right, my good man, I wish you would."

"Mr. Cunningham walked away, not a little relieved in mind."

"Well, if the papers have been taken by a mere boy," he mused, "it may not be so bad. Finding they are not valuable to him, he may destroy them, and, great as the loss is, that will be better than having them fall into the hands of some person who could use them against me."

The uncertainty, however, caused the troubled look to remain upon his face as he left the dock.

Losing no time, he made his way to the office of one of the steamship companies, where he was fortunately just in time to meet Captain Elliott as he was coming away.

"Why, what is the matter?" the captain added.

"That chart, my papers," the hunchback

answered hastily; "I could not find them when I went back."

"The chart was left lying on the table, Mr. Cunningham; I did not see anything of any papers while I was there. Who do you suppose took them?"

The hunchback told what he knew of the matter.

"It is too bad," the captain sympathized, "but we can get along without the chart, knowing where the island is."

"Yes, but the papers: I doubt whether we can find what we are going for without them. We must sail just as soon as possible, Captain Elliott, to prevent any one getting there ahead of us."

"Well, let us make it the day after tomorrow, then, instead of the third day from this, as arranged. I'll do my best not to disappoint you."

"Very well; but even earlier than that, if possible."

They talked further, and when finally they parted the hunchback took a carriage, giving the driver directions to a place well up town.

His destination was a handsome residence on one of the aristocratic streets and the servant who answered his ring showed him every mark of respect, recognizing him as one having the entree.

"Is Miss Stafford at home?" he made inquiry.

"Yes, sir," the reply. "Will you please walk in, sir?"

He was courteously shown into the drawing-room, wherein a few minutes Miss Stafford joined him.

It was the same Miss Stafford whose acquaintance we have already made, of course, the Vera Stafford whom we have seen at the office of the detective.

"I am glad to see you!" she exclaimed, offering him both her hands with the utmost unreserve. "I have been thinking about you all day. But, your eyes look troubled. What is it, Conrad?"

"Nothing serious, loved one," with a fond caress. "I have met with a loss, that is all."

"A loss?"

"Yes; some valuable papers. I bring you worse news than that, however, if you love me as well as you say you do."

"Can you question that?"

"Not for a moment, my darling Vera. The news I bring you is, that I have come to say good-by sooner than I expected I would. I have found a captain for my new yacht, and we sail just as quickly as we can get ready."

The young woman's face grew sad immediately.

"I wish you were not going," she said.

"Or, if you must go, that I were going with you."

"Impossible, Vera. And I must go; nothing must detain me, not even you, my dearest."

"But, is it impossible, Conrad?"

"Positively, Vera."

"I know, as things are; but, could I not go as—as your wife?"

"No, loved one, no. This is a secret which you cannot share, and about which you must never question me."

"Do you think this quite fair to me?"

"I know it is not, but I am helpless. You trust me, do you not?"

"Yes, I know I can trust you, but can you not tell me more of this matter than you have told me?"

"Is it not enough when I tell you I am helpless? This secret is not mine, but another's, Vera. There, can you not trust me fully now? Need I say more? Gladly would I tell you all, could I but do so."

"It is enough, Conrad; I will press you no further."

"Bless you, my precious."

"And when do you return?" the young

woman asked, when their talk again turned upon the proposed voyage.

"I cannot tell, but I do not expect to be away two months all together. After that time you may look for me any moment."

"It will seem two years to me."

"And to me."

"One question more, Conrad, before I let you go: Do you still assure me that Elson Longdale can have nothing to do with this voyage?"

The hunchback laughed lightly.

"Of course I still assure you of that," he answered. "Elson Longdale can know nothing about this secret, and if he did, could not one way or the other influence me in the matter."

He had risen to take his leave, and again he held her hands in his.

It was a striking contrast, the beautiful young woman, superbly molded, and this man so deformed.

Taking their faces alone, however, and more especially their eyes, the difference was not so great; in fact, both were expressive of truth and honor and uprightness.

"You know I am anxious for your safety, after the threat be made," the lady rejoined. "You will be watchful of him, will you not?"

"Yes, I will be watchful, but there is nothing to fear; his threat was a meaningless one, born of his disappointment; he would not attempt to carry it out, I am sure."

"I am not so sure of that, Conrad. His character is not like yours, and for that reason you must be guarded."

"And you are too apprehensive, I am sure. What can he do to carry out his threat?"

"He might kill you; and in truth that was what I inferred he meant."

"Oh, no; he may be evil, but he is not bad enough for that. But, be not anxious, for I will guard against him."

And so their conversation closed, so far as it concerns us, and presently they parted. Little they imagined how their mutual foe—so to call him—meant to carry out the threat he had made.

CHAPTER VI.

A CLUE AND A RUSE.

BROADWAY BILLY was about leaving his office for the day when the door opened and Billy Junior entered, in all the glory of his rags and patches.

We will designate him "Billy Junior," without the formality of a comma, for so he was now called, as if the "junior" were his last name proper. His old name came out once in a while, as on this occasion.

"Hello, Ticket," Billy greeted him; "what brings you here?"

"Don't you go back on me like that, now, Mr. Weston," the Arab complained. "I am Broadway Billy, Junior."

"That's so; I beg your pardon. Well, Billy Junior, what have you got to say for yourself? Have you been running up against a case again? You don't bear any marks of having got the worst of it."

"Mebby I don't, boss, but I have bucked up against another riddle, and don't you doubt it. I've poked my nose into one of the greatest old ring-twisted diffikilties you ever heard tell of, by Jupe! I've got a tale to ontwist that'll make your hair git up an' curl."

Billy had to laugh at the urchin's earnestness, and he saw his own early boyhood faithfully portrayed. He had well named this little fellow Broadway Billy after himself.

"Well, take a seat, Billy Junior," he invited, "and let me hear all about it. There must be something in it, I suppose."

"Something in it!" cried the young namesake, as he put his box on the floor and sat down on it, taking off his ragged cap and

pping it down beside him. "You will say there is, I guess, when you have heard me chirp."

"Then let me hear you."

Billy Junior went ahead, then, and told his story in his own peculiar and faithful manner, his chief listening with close attention.

"Well, this is interesting, sure enough," Broadway Billy declared, when he had heard all. "This is something out of the usual, decidedly. But, where are the papers?"

"I'm divin' fer 'em now," Billy Junior made answer, and he was thrusting his hand—and almost his arm as well—into the ragged recesses of his attire. "Ha! here they are; I knowed they couldn't git out o' that, even if they did roam around a bit."

Broadway Billy laughed again as he took the papers, and he turned to his desk to look them over and learn what they were.

He had not proceeded very far when his face changed expression, and a prolonged whistle escaped his lips.

"What is it, Mr. Weston?" Billy Junior asked eagerly.

"It is a wonderful discovery, that's what it is, my boy," Billy answered. "A secret that has been dead these forty years."

"And is jest comin' to life again?"

"Yes, thanks to you."

"That was a purty long snooze, forty years, now wasn't it? Guess it went dead fore I was born. But, what is it?"

"That I cannot tell you, now. It is something for which the detectives of the whole world were on the alert forty years ago, a mystery which they gave over in despair of ever solving."

"An' you are goin' to do it?"

"It is done already; these papers set forth the whole matter in plain words. Mind you, not a breath of this to a living soul, Ticket."

"Billy Joonyer, if ye please, boss."

"Yes, so I meant."

"Trust me fer that. I'm Broadway Billy the Second, and I'm goin' to be jest as near like the First as I kin. You'll never hear a peep out of me ef you say so, an' that's what ye have said."

"I know I can trust you; I am seldom mistaken in my estimate of a character. You say they intend stealing that yacht to-night?"

"This very night, boss. They are to meet at Smithkin's at ten, and I s'pose they'll go from there to the boat an' cut her loose and steam out. That is, that's what they have planned."

"And we'll let them carry it out, too."

"What! Ain't you goin' to stop 'em?"

"Not a bit, Billy Junior; but I am going to sail with them, if I have to take passage as a stowaway."

"Jupety Jupel! Ye don't mean it, do ye?"

"Of course I mean it. Would I say so if I didn't?"

Even while talking thus with the boy, Billy was still looking at the papers and his brain was busy.

It was as he had said. Here he was master of a secret that had for years been the puzzle of the world. He could hardly believe that he was awake and not dreaming.

That it should have remained for him to clear the matter up, seemed wonderful. But, then, he had not accomplished that end yet; he had only come into the possession of the means by which to do it. Whether he would be able to carry out his purpose or not, was another question.

The matter was one about which he had heard, or read, but it had never been much thought about, except as a matter of wonder. A mystery which had been given up years before he was born and had little concern for him. But now it was different; he had come into possession of the key which would unlock the whole enigma.

Now he could understand the mystery surrounding Conrad Cunningham, and the secret voyage he proposed making.

He could understand why Cunningham could not tell his betrothed his secret.

When he had studied the papers to his satisfaction he put them in his pocket, and turned to Billy Junior, who had remained quiet since his last-quoted question.

"Some points you haven't given me, Billy Junior," he spoke. "What dock is this yacht lying at? And what is the address of this boarding-house where you overheard the plot to steal her?"

The questions were promptly answered.

"Good enough," said Billy, then. "If you want to do further work in the case, Billy Junior, you may go back there and pick up whatever you can. I will be there this evening, in disguise as a sailor, but you must take good care not to draw attention to me, should you recognize me."

Full assurance was given on that point, and Billy knew he could trust the shrewd boy.

Billy Junior having told all he had to tell, nothing remained but for him to take his leave, and when he had done so Broadway Billy closed the office and went home.

It would not pay him to waste time trying to look up Harry and Seth, and it was not necessary anyhow, since he could leave word for them at home, where they would come as soon as the work which had been given them would allow.

The evening was advancing when a jolly sailor rolled rollickingly into the boarding-house kept by Niles Smithkin.

He was a young man with a full, round face and a complexion a woman might envy, and was solidly built and the picture of health and good spirits.

At first glance one might have thought he was just a little tipsy, but a second look would put that thought to flight. He was simply jolly, that was all, and completely happy.

"Hello, mate!" called out Smithkin, cheerily. "you seem to be as happy as a clam."

"Might as well be that way as any other, cap'n," was the response. "Don't want to go around like a water-logged hulk 'cause the tide is 'gainst me."

"What's the matter? Out of a berth?"

"That's it."

"Well, that's bad, sure enough; but as long as a feller has a little money to tide over with—"

"That's what's the matter with me, cap'n, I'm in a dead calm; ain't got enough money left for the price of a bed to-night; but, what's the odds so long's you're happy?"

There was evidence of reserve in Smithkin's manner immediately.

A sailor with money is the delig' t of Jack Tar's boarding-house; one without that essential commodity is not wanted.

"Kin ye give me a bunk fer to-night?" the young sailor openly asked.

"Can't do it," the reply. "We are full clear up to-night, and you'll have to look further."

With that the proprietor of the place cut his part of the conversation short and turned away, the sailor looking after him for a moment before speaking.

"That's the way it goes," he presently observed. "When I had a pocketful of barnacles I was a purty good feller; now that I ain't got none I don't amount to much. But, I ain't goin' to cry."

His face immediately reassumed its happy look, and he broke out in a verse of a jolly song.

Thus he walked down the room, his hands in his pocket, and every eye upon him.

He had not proceeded far when he was hailed.

"Look here, Jack!" a voice called out; and he stopped to learn who had spoken to him, if to him at all.

At one of the tables was a hard-looking man, who motioned.

The sailor advanced to where the man sat, and was invited to take a seat, which he did. The sailor was Broadway Billy, and he had found his man.

"What's your name?" Captain Trucker asked.

"Jack Roper," the prompt answer.

"And you're out of a berth and out of money, you say?"

"That's jes' the kind of a storm I'm tryin' to ride out, cap'n," quite as promptly.

"Well, you seem like a likely hand; how would you like to ship with me?" Trucker asked.

"I'm ready to ship with anybody, on any kind of a craft, provided there is grub in the locker and I can have a hack at it shortly."

"Then I'll take you," was the short decision. "I'm going to sail about midnight, for a short voyage. Go into the back room there and I'll order you a supper, and then you can wait around till the rest of the crew get here."

Billy gladly accepted, and did as directed. His ruse had worked even better than he had dared to hope it would.

CHAPTER VII.

SETTING A CRUEL SNARE.

BILLY JUNIOR, in leaving the office of his patron, went forth with a keen desire to figure further in the case upon which he had already done so striking a stroke of work.

He hardly cared to venture again into the saloon where he had picked up the papers dropped by Captain Trucker, fearful that the captain might still be there and that he might remember him and call him to account. And if not there, it would be a waste of time to go anyhow.

So, instead, he bent his steps in the direction of the pier where the yacht Gauntlet was moored.

He reached his destination, and went out upon the dock with his usual air of independence.

The yacht was still there, with no one aboard so far as could be seen.

Billy Junior advanced to where she was made fast, and dropping his box, sat down upon it to think and to watch while he thought.

"I'd like to, by Jupel!" his thinking soon reached a climax. "If Broadway William is going with 'em, Broadway William the Twoth would like to go ditto. But, I don't see how it's possible."

At that moment a heavy hand fell upon his shoulder, closing sufficiently tight to hold him and yet having strength in reserve to crush him if that was necessary, as the boy instantly thought, and with a cry of alarm the young bootblack leaped to his feet.

He found himself in the grasp of a powerful, red-faced Irishman.

"Ah-ha, ye spalpeen!" the man exclaimed. "O! have got ye, have O! Maybe it is somethin' more ye would be afther stealing."

"You let me go," cried Billy Junior, jerking to get away. "I ain't been stealin' nothin' yet, an' stealin' ain't in my line anyhow. Let me go, I tell ye, ye great big duffer."

"A great big duffer, am O! Fur wan cint it's flingin' av ye cl'ane over into dhe wather O! d be. Don't ye be tellin' me it's nothin' ye have been stealing; didn't O! see ye wid me own two eyes? Phwere's dhem papers ye was afther takin' from dhe cabin av dhis boat?"

"I ain't took no papers from no cabin—"

"Don't ye be lyin' to Pat McGoon, ye spalpeen. Didn't O! see ye run away wid dhem—"

"No, ye didn't; but I was after the feller what did take 'em. You let me go, or I'll yell fur the p'lice. You can't scare me even if you are biggest."

"Yell fur dhe p'lice, w'u'd ye? Begob, ye

may do that same an' welcome, an ye want to; it will save me dhe trouble av taking ye to dhem mesel', dhat is all. Oi want dhem papers ye took."

"I didn't take any papers."

"Ye loie, ye spalpeen."

"No, I don't lie."

"Oi say ye do."

"I don't."

"Didn't dhe gintleman come out an' tell me roihgt afther ye had skipped out wid dhem? And didn't he tell me he would give me a hundred dollars an Oi would get dhem back again fur him? An ye know whin ye are well off, me b'y, ye will hand dhem over instanter."

Billy Junior was in a bad fix and he knew it.

In avoiding danger at the boarding-house saloon, he had run right into it here where he had least expected it.

He protested his innocence with all earnestness, but he could not convince his captor that he was telling the truth, and he dared not undertake to prove it, for that would be tray Broadway Billy.

"Dhen ye won't tell me?" the Irishman finally demanded, after giving his little prisoner a good shaking.

"I do tell ye I'm innocent," Billy Junior insisted. "Can't ye believe me?"

"Begob, Oi can't, dhen. Do ye know phwat Oi'm going to do wid ye?"

"You are big enough to eat me, if you have a mind to."

"Dhe which same Oi haven't; it is more choice av me stoomach Oi am; but Oi am going to make a prisoner av ye till dhe morry whin dhat gintleman will come around. Oi am afther dhat hundred dollars, and don't ye furget it."

"Well, you won't get it, all the same, if you have to get the papers to earn it. I didn't take the papers from the boat, and that settles it. You kin make me a prisoner if ye want to, but that's all the good it will do ye. I'll make it hot fur you when I do get away, though, you bet."

"Bah! it is talkin' ye are. Oi have got ye and Oi'm going to hould fast to ye. Come along wid me."

With that the burly Irishman, having a firm grip on the Arab's collar, lifted him clear and carried him toward the yacht.

The workmen had been leaving the dock when the boy appeared, and now no one was at hand to see what was going on and the Irishman had it all his own way.

Stepping aboard the yacht, he opened the hatch over the hold with one hand, and with the other swung his prisoner over and allowed him to drop in, seeming to care little whether it hurt him or not.

"Dhere," he called down to him. "How do ye loike dhat? Oi t'ink it is safe ye will kape dhere till dhe morry, and whin dhe gintleman comes Oi will tell him ye are dhere and he can get a policeman to help ye out. Ye may as well go to slape and take it 'asy, fur it is fastening down dhe hatch Oi'll be doing now."

Billy Junior rattled off a defiant response, but the man not paying any attention, closed the hatch and secured it and left the yacht.

"Jupety Jupel!" cried Billy Junior to himself, "but here is a pretty mess, sure enough. I guess I'll go to sea now, whether I want to or not. Wonder what they'll do with me when they find me aboard? Mebby they'll throw me over fer shark bait—but, then, Billy the Onest will be there, if his plan carries, an' he'll put in a good word fer me."

He knew it would be useless to try to get out, so did not make any attempt to do so, but sat down on his box there in the dark and proceeded philosophically to make the best of a bad situation.

Fortunately he had landed upon his feet, like a cat, and that upon a level surface, and as the fall had not been a great one, he had escaped injury.

And, was not this just what he had been wishing for?

In the mean time what of Happy Harry and Silent Seth?

Seth, it will be remembered, had been set as guardian over Mr. Conningham, while Harry was to keep a watchful eye upon Elson Longdale.

The first move on the part of the Silent Shadower had been to go to the man's residence and make inquiry for him, in order to get upon his track, but at first he had met with slow success.

Conningham was out, and the servants could not say where he had gone or when he would return with any degree of certainty, so there was nothing for Seth to do but remain in the street and watch for his coming, and by so doing his patience was at last rewarded.

A carriage finally drew up before the house and stopped, and Mr. Conningham alighted, Seth recognizing him immediately, there being small chance for a mistake in this respect; and the carriage drove away. And so, Seth now having his man safely at home, his mind was more at ease. It now remained only for him to see that no harm came to him.

Hours passed. Night came on, and a light in a certain room, and a shadow on a curtain, showed Seth which room the hunchback occupied. No one entered or left the house. Finally at a late hour, the light was put out, and the house was dark, and not until then did the young detective think of leaving his post; nor even then, till he had waited an ample time to see whether any one would come out following the extinguishment.

As well assured as he could be, then, that his man was safe for the night, he gave up his vigil and went home, where the surprising word left by Billy awaited him.

Late as it was and tired as he was Seth set out immediately for the dock his chief had named, hoping to reach there before the yacht cast off.

Billy had left such information only as might prove useful, and the location of the Gauntlet was one of the points.

And now having brought up Seth and his movements, let us turn to see what of the other shadower.

His first move had been similar to that made by Silent Seth, but less successful, at first. At the house he had learned where Longdale was supposed to be, but on going to that place found he had gone somewhere else. And so it kept on till after dark, when he finally ran his man down and located him in the dining-room of a popular hotel.

Longdale was seated at a small table, with another young man of about his own age, of a dissipated, desperate-looking description.

Harry entered the place, being well dressed, and ordered a light lunch, hoping to overhear something.

That was out of the question, however, for the conversation was carried on in tones too low. And finally Longdale rose to go.

"You'll not disappoint me?" Harry then heard him say.

"That I'll promise you," was the assurance given. "I'll attend to it all."

"Then there's nothing more to be said. The price I offer you is big, so you must not fail me."

Then they parted, and for a moment Harry was in a quandary. He knew not what to do, and had to do some rapid thinking to decide.

It took him but a few seconds to do that.

Longdale's companion had by no means a prepossessing look, in fact, he was the very kind of a fellow for a desperate job, and what Harry had heard was enough to show that he had been engaged for something of that kind.

It did not seem likely that Longdale would undertake any work of a criminal

nature himself, and knowing he had offered the other a big price for something, Harry quickly decided that if any danger threatened Conrad Conningham from this source, this was the man for him to shadow.

So, he allowed Longdale to go and took up this other instead.

Harry had not learned his name, but that was immaterial so long as he knew him by sight and was piping him.

The fellow remained around the hotel a long time, smoking and idling, talking when he had any one to talk with; and every little while consulting his watch, as if not to overstay his time.

At last he went forth, and Happy Harry after him.

The man went to a stable, hired a closed carriage, and mounting the box with the driver, engaged him in earnest talk as the vehicle rolled away.

Harry was not left behind, he assured. The carriage drove straight to the house of Vera Stafford, where the driver sprung down from his box and ran up the steps and rung the bell.

CHAPTER VIII.

HARRY'S HOLD-UP.

VERA STAFFORD had retired for the night, or at any rate had gone to her room for that purpose, when the bell rung.

Interested, for a call at that hour was quite out of the usual course of things, she opened her door and listened over the railing to learn who the caller was and what was wanted.

She heard a man's voice, and her own name mentioned.

The next moment the servant came running up the stairs to tell her what was wanted, and Vera met her in the hall.

"Who is it, Susan?" she asked. "What is it?"

"You are sent for, Miss Stafford," was breathlessly explained. "Mr. Conningham has been hurt and wants you to come to him."

"Good heavens! Who is the person who brings this news, Susan? What has happened to Conrad—to Mr. Conningham? It was what I feared, and all my precaution has amounted to nothing."

"It's the driver of a carriage that's come for you, ma'm," the servant explained. "He does not say what has happened, ma'm, but by the way he speaks and the hurry he's in I think it must be serious. Shall I fix to go with you, ma'm? I can be ready in a minute."

"Yes, yes; get ready and we will go."

The servant ran down stairs again, while Miss Stafford sprung to a closet for a cloak, following her the next moment.

No scheme could have been better than this, for the evil purpose intended, considering the state of mind the young woman was in already in her anxiety for her lover's safety.

The man was still waiting at the door.

"Did Mr. Conningham send you for me, sir?" Vera quickly asked.

"Not himself, lady, but one of his servants I suppose it was; and I was to fetch ye in haste."

"Do you know what has happened?"

"No; but it's somethin' awful; I know by what was said."

Others in the house were now astir, and Mrs. Stafford, Vera's mother, called down to learn what was wrong.

Vera answered as briefly as possible with clearness, and calling to the servant to hurry, followed the man out and to the carriage, the door of which was open.

Without a thought of danger she sprung in, when instantly strong hands seized her and she was forced down upon a seat, unable to make an outcry, and the driver leaping to his place, the carriage was off.

Harry had debated whether to interfere

or not, and had quickly decided not to do so.

In the first place, he might not have succeeded in convincing the young woman of the trap, and then, secondly, it would be to expose himself and he would then be unable to render any help.

For these reasons he held his peace, remaining in the place he had taken under the carriage while it stood there, and while the servant was making an ado at being thus left behind, and while the household was soon in a state of excitement, he was going along with the victim of the plot.

The snare had been a clever one, but it might have been better set and sprung had it been done at an earlier hour and with less horrible a decoy to lure the young woman from the house. So it had been, however, and, suspicions aroused, no time was lost by the servants in going to the residence of Mr. Cunningham to learn whether the report was true or false.

Finding it to have been false, the excitement was tenfold increased. Conrad Cunningham went to the police as soon as possible, as did also Mr. Stafford, upon the return of the servants with the report, and in less than an hour a general alarm had been sent out and the police were on the alert; it was too late, for what had happened had taken place before all this could be brought about. They could not have interfered.

Broadway Billy, as said, entered the mess-room of Smithkin's boarding-house as directed, glad that his ruse had succeeded so well.

Captain Trucker provided a supper, as promised, to which Billy forced himself to make at least a show of doing justice, and after it was over he recognized the captain in the saloon.

Others were now with the captain, chief among whom were Mark Welch and Tom Sand, and to them and others Billy was introduced as Jack Roper, the name he had assumed. Taken altogether, they were quite a crew, though all the old hands had not been found.

The engineer had been hunted up, after a good deal of trouble, since he was the most important of all, save the captain; and when Billy joined the group the captain was telling the men what they had need to know concerning the voyage they were about to make; and needless to add, they all fell in with his plans and were ready for the adventure.

The Gauntlet, as has been shown, had been owned by a man who was nothing less than a rascally gambler, and his crew had been of kindred stripe with himself.

Finally all left the saloon and repaired to the dock where the yacht was lying.

There would have been a watchman on the yacht, but the man whose duty it was to watch her was abusing the confidence of his employer and had not been near the yacht at all that evening.

On arriving there, Captain Trucker and his men found her dark and deserted, and they took immediate possession. Fire was started under the boiler, and preparations begun at once for a departure as speedily as possible. Lanterns were lighted and put in position as boldly as if nothing was amiss.

All the ropes were cast off save one, and everything was in readiness to let go that one at a moment's notice and drop away with the tide, if necessary.

While this was going on a policeman sauntered out on the dock.

"Going to go out, captain?" he asked of Trucker.

"Yes, we're off," the bold reply.

"Kind of a queer hour to start, ain't it?"

"We are taking the tide, you see. It'll be just right in an hour or less."

"What yacht is this?"

"The Gauntlet."

The captain recognized that this officer was just a little suspicious, and knew he must allay his suspicions to avoid trouble.

"Where going?" the next question.

"Newport."

The officer loitered around a few minutes, during which time Captain Trucker hustled about and boldly gave his orders, and presently he sauntered off, satisfied in his own mind that all was as it should be.

He had no reason to think otherwise, really.

Trucker cursed him mildly when he had gone, wishing people in general and police officers in particular would mind their own business.

In the mean time Billy Junior, imprisoned in the hold of the yacht, had been taking a comfortable sleep, accustomed as he was to sleeping anywhere where chance afforded.

Growing drowsy while sitting on his box thinking, he had felt around till he ascertained the kind of place he was in, and selecting a choice spot for his purpose, had lain down and dropped off as peacefully as though reposing upon a king's thrice-blown bed of down.

When he awoke he heard men tramping this way and that, and the clanking of the furnace and other sounds told him plainly what was going on.

"I'm in fer it, by Jupel!" he exclaimed to himself. "I won't squeal now, if I lose a leg. If they find me 'fore they cut loose they'll bounce me ashore on the double quick."

Having had the desire, if not indeed the intention of stowing away on the yacht, he was not going to back out now. The expectation of making the voyage with Broadway Billy was what inspired him. Having the "fever" badly, he was ready to run any risks to see the case to the end!

"No-sir-ree," he decided, "nary a peep out o' me. I've got nobody ter mourn fer me, an' I guess I kin eat an' sleep jes' as good in one part of the world as any other."

That decision arrived at, he coolly rolled over and dropped off to sleep again, spite of noise and all.

In about an hour sufficient steam had been raised to start with.

Captain Trucker was ready to cast off, and only waited for the coming of Elson Longdale, according to agreement.

About that time a shadowy form came down along the side of the dock opposite to where the yacht lay, slowly and cautiously, as if desirous of not being seen by any one on the yacht.

It was none other than Silent Seth, the Shadower!

Reaching a point directly opposite the yacht, he advanced to where some bales were piled in the middle of the pier, and there took up his station.

He watched those aboard the yacht as well as he could in the dim light, and after awhile detected his chief, Broadway Billy, among the others, playing his role so well as almost to deceive his able ally.

Seth hoped for a chance to give him a signal, to let him know he was there, but no chance offered, and while he waited the sound of a carriage was suddenly heard on the land end of the pier, and at the same time a man sprung up from the shadows at the other end of the bales and advanced quickly to the yacht.

"Trucker?" he called.

"Right here," the response. "That you, Longdale?"

"Yes; the carriage is coming, so have your men ready to lend a hand the moment it gets here."

Just then the piercing note of a policeman's whistle came to their ears, from the direction of the street, and Elson Longdale quickly added:

"What does that mean?"

"I don't know," answered Trucker, "and

don't care, either. We can push off in one minute after you get aboard. Here, Tom, Jack, and the rest of you; stand by to lend a hand!"

The carriage was now almost at hand, and Silent Seth was on the alert for whatever might be required of him.

Watching sharply, he saw somebody running after the carriage, and that somebody just then sounded again the sharp whistle-signal for police help.

The carriage came up and stopped, and as it did so this man or boy—Seth was yet unable to decide which it was—reached it, and springing to the door faced the man with a revolver in hand, and cried:

"Keep off, now, or by the shades of Christopher Columbia, if I don't plug lead into ye till you'll die of lead poison! There's somethin' crooked about this business, and this lady ain't goin' aboard that boat till the police have had a hand in the game, you bet!"

CHAPTER IX.

THE RESCUE—DOUBTS AND FEARS.

THE instant Harry ceased speaking, he blew again the whistle-signal, and now it was answered from the end of the dock.

"Thunder!" cried Captain Trucker. "The deuce is to pay, now! Aboard with her, for I must cut adrift this minute! Pitch that stripling into the water, boys; he's a blow-hard!"

"Yes, but there's two of us," now spoke Silent Seth, who, having sprung under the carriage, now appeared at Harry's side, weapon in hand. "Keep off, or the worse for you."

"At them!" thundered Longdale. "There isn't a second to lose! Fifty dollars to the man who will knock them off the dock! At them, I tell you, or—"

"Not any fer me, boss," declared Jack Roper, decisively. "I think too much o' my health. Here comes the p'lice!"

With that he leaped back again aboard the yacht, and some others followed his example. By this move Broadway Billy threw the victory into the hands of his aides.

It had been all a surprise to Billy, of course, but he took in the situation at a glance, and took action accordingly.

Captain Trucker saw how it was going, and acted promptly.

"Board ship!" he shouted. "Cast off, there!"

He sprung aboard himself as he gave the order, and Elson Longdale was wild almost.

All this was taking place in the space of so few seconds that it seems difficult to set it forth aright. It is quite impossible to quote all, for exclamations and ejaculations were heard on every hand.

Meantime Longdale's accomplice, or tool, seeing how it was going, had leaped out of the carriage on the opposite side, and was making his way with all haste toward the end of the dock, hoping to escape unseen; and, all the chances being in his favor, he succeeded.

The sailors responded promptly to Captain Trucker's command and the last rope was cast off, and by that time the police were near at hand.

Seeing himself deserted, and only one way of escape, Longdale took that way, and not a second too soon.

The yacht was already dropping away, and he had to run and make a long leap to get aboard of her, but he landed safely, just as a couple of policemen came rushing up to the spot where the carriage stood.

The driver of the carriage, too, was now in great alarm, and was trying to make it appear that he was innocent of all, not knowing anything was wrong; but Happy Harry quickly attended to him, having no other foes now to claim his attention, and Seth seconded Harry's lead.

"What is the matter here?" demanded the policemen, on reaching the scene.

"Matter enough," answered Harry, without hesitation. "We have just nipped a kidnap game in the bud. There's a lady in this carriage that some rascals intended to get aboard that yacht, but we got onto their scheme and have punched a hole in it."

"And who are you?"

"We're Broadway Billy's bowlers!"

"Ha!" one of the officers cried. "I thought everything wasn't quite right about that craft when I was here awhile ago."

"We must stop her," spoke up the other. "Hello, there, the yacht? Come back here!"

The only response was a mocking laugh.

"Come back, or we'll fire!"

"Fire and be blowed!"

The officer did fire, a couple of shots in the air, but another laugh of defiance was the only result so far as stopping the yacht was concerned.

He fired again, this time sending a bullet unpleasantly near, and Captain Trucker broke forth in a tirade of execration, declaring he would make it hot if another shot was fired.

"Useless," the officer remarked, putting away his revolver. "We can't bring them back, but we can attend to what we have got here. You say you are Broadway Billy's men?" turning to Harry and Seth. "If that's so, I suppose this case belongs to him."

"Yes, so it does," Harry answered.

"And what do you want us to do, then?"

"Arrest this driver, and help us in getting this lady back home again."

"Ha! the lady!"

In his excitement the officer had for the moment forgotten that important part of the matter, and now he threw open the door of the carriage and looked in.

The opposite door was wide open, and reclining on the seat, unconscious, was the form of a woman. The odor of some drug was plainly detected, proving that she had been by that means rendered insensible.

"Who is she?" the officer asked.

"I don't know, but I know where she lives," answered Harry.

"Get in, then, you two, and I'll mount the box with the driver and we'll get her home as quickly as possible."

This was acted upon, and after a few words privately together, the policemen parted company, one remaining on duty while the other went with his prisoner on the box of the carriage.

Harry and Seth began immediately trying to restore the woman to consciousness, upon entering the carriage, Harry's tongue rattling away at as lively a rate as the carriage itself when it started; and before they reached their destination their efforts were rewarded.

The woman gave a gasp, opened her eyes, and immediately cried out, though but faintly:

"Spare me! Oh! why are you taking—"

"We are friends," interrupted Seth. "Do not be alarmed, lady."

"Friends?"

"Bet your life we are!" cried Harry. "We have rescued you from that villain who lied to you, and we are taking you back home again."

"Oh! this is too good to be true. Who, then, are you?"

"We are Broadway Billy's beagles, ma'am."

"Thank God! It was well I applied to him for protection, yet little did I dream I needed his protection more for myself than for another person whom I named; but, of course you know."

"You mean Mr. Conningham?"

"Yes; and this is proof that you are indeed my friends."

They talked on, then, in confidence, until their destination was reached, and there was

joy in that household when Vera Stafford was restored to her home alive and well.

The good news was sent out, close following upon the call for police help, and as soon as it reached the ears of Conrad Conningham he repaired to the Stafford residence, late as the hour was.

Vera Stafford had insisted upon having Harry and Seth remain until he came, being certain he would come as soon as word reached him.

When greetings and congratulations had been exchanged, all sat down for a conference.

"You say they have stolen my yacht?" the hunchback demanded, as soon as that was made known to him. "You cannot mean to say they have stolen my yacht!"

"That's the fact of the case, sir," assured Happy Harry.

"Tell me, who was it took her?"

"I suppose the man who tried to steal this lady, seeing that he jumped aboard and went with her."

"Elson Longdale! Can it be possible? But, he had help; he could not manage the yacht alone; this has not been the work of a moment, but has been schemed and planned ahead."

"I can throw some light upon that," spoke up Silent Seth. "The men who handled the yacht were the captain and crew who had her in charge when you bought her from her last owner, sir."

"How did you get this information? What knew you about her former owner or her crew?"

Seth could not answer this, since he had gotten his points from what Billy had left for him at home, and he would not betray the hand of his chief in the case.

"That I cannot disclose to you, sir," he said simply.

"That's jes' like Silent Seth," Harry here came promptly to his relief. "You can't make him talk and keep him talkin', nohow, no use tryin'. Now with me it's different; it ain't any trouble to make me talk, but when you come to stoppin' me, that's another matter—"

A burst of laughter interrupted him, and Harry looked around in pretending amaze, which only caused it to increase, and so he rescued Seth from any further questioning in the same line.

"There is more to this than I can understand," remarked Mr. Conningham, when the talk was resumed. "Whether the yacht was stolen for the purpose of carrying you away in her, Vera, or whether those stolen papers— Ha! no matter what it was, I must sail just as quickly as possible, now!"

He had grown excited in a moment.

"Have you employed a detective to hunt for the papers for you?" the young woman asked.

"No, no, I have not done so."

"Then why do you not? This same Broadway Billy would be a good person to engage. See what he has done for me."

"Had you been to see him, then?"

"I had, I will confess; I employed him to guard you against Longdale, little thinking it was I who needed the protection."

"You did that?"

The hunchback was upon his feet in an instant, pacing the floor.

"Yes, certainly I did it, Conrad, for love for you, I cannot see that there was anything wrong in that."

"No, no; nothing wrong, nothing wrong; certainly not; and yet— This uncertainty is driving me mad, mad! Would to God I had never learned the truth, or that I had taken better care of the papers— But, who would have thought of their being stolen from there?"

He paced the floor nervously, the others looking upon him with various thoughts and emotions.

"There is but one thing to do," he said,

finally. "I must sail in pursuit, as quick as possible, for I greatly fear— But, I dares not mention what I fear. What if my papers should fall into the hands of that detective? My God!" And then he seemed to rouse out of his musings, recollecting that he was speaking his thoughts aloud, and said no more. And a little later the conference closed.

CHAPTER X.

THE OCEAN CHASE.

On the following morning, when Harry and Seth came down to the office, their first business was to decide *what* their business was.

And that was not hard to do, for Broadway Billy's directions had been too plain to admit of any mistake. They had been told not to meddle with the affairs of Longdale or Conningham further than necessary.

They had done the work assigned to them, and their further service on the case was not required. They had foiled Longdale in his rascally scheme, he had gone out on the yacht, and it did not appear that Conningham or Miss Stafford needed any further detective protection.

So, the matter was dropped, and the two youths turned their whole attention to the management of Broadway Billy's affairs until his return.

Meantime, the hunchback was up bright and early, despite his broken night's rest, and at an early hour appeared on board his yacht, the Peer, greatly to the surprise of the crew who were there.

"Has your captain been aboard since I was last here?" he asked hurriedly.

"No, sir," the answer.

"Go and find him immediately and tell him to come here. I want to see him on business of the greatest importance."

He referred, of course to the captain of the Peer, and not to Captain Elliott, whom he had engaged for the voyage on board the Gauntlet.

The man to whom the order was given set off immediately, and when he had directed another to start a fire and get up steam, the owner repaired to the cabin to wait.

In due time the captain of the Peer arrived.

"How would you like to take a vacation, your pay to go right on while you are away?" the hunchback asked, after greeting.

"I take it you want me to do so, Mr. Conningham, and of course it will be quite agreeable to me," the captain responded.

"You are right, Captain Pridmore. You remember what I told you about my intention respecting the Gauntlet?"

"Certainly."

"Well, that has been knocked in the head. The Gauntlet was stolen last night, and—"

"Stolen!"

"Yes; and so my plans have all been upset. I must, in order to carry them out as intended, put Elliott in command of the Peer for this occasion, but you are to have command upon our return."

"I'm sorry I'm not to be trusted to handle my own craft in an emergency, Mr. Conningham. When you had two yachts, it was all right for you to have two captains; but now you have but the one, yet you remove me to give place to a stranger. I say this because I feel it."

"I have made an agreement with Captain Elliott which I cannot break, Captain Pridmore. Do not ask for any further explanation. Let me give you two months' pay in advance, and you may have two months in which to do as you please. As soon as steam is up I want you to take the Peer to where the Gauntlet lay yesterday, and then you may depart."

"Very well, sir, I cannot complain."

"Whatever you command, my business is to obey."

Such the substance of their talk, and the captain left the cabin to carry out his orders.

"A good fellow, a thoroughly good fellow," the yacht-owner mused, when he had gone, "but not to be trusted in a business of this kind. Besides, he hasn't been out of sight of land for years."

In due time the yacht was moved to the desired place, and there Captain Pridmore took leave of her.

The owner had already given orders respecting the provisioning of the yacht for a voyage, and by the time the yacht reached the deck, some of the orders were there awaiting.

While this order was going on, Captain Elliott put in his appearance, in response to word that had been sent him, and following his coming, just as soon as the yacht could be made ready, the lines were cast off and she dropped down the bay and put out to sea.

A close watch was kept for the Gauntlet, but nothing was seen of her, and the Peer laid her course direct for the island to which the hunchback had called the attention of his captain.

To return to the Gauntlet.

While Captain Trucker was still swearing, after the policeman had fired at him, he got the yacht under way and was quickly speeding down the river.

His signal lamps were in place and burning, and once started, everything was favorable for his unhindered progress, and ere long he was steaming down the bay with every prospect for getting safely away.

In fact, there was nothing short of an accident to hinder his doing so, and no accident happened.

Elson Longdale was pacing the deck in a savage mood.

He had not once spoken, so far, but had left Captain Trucker to his swearing and the savage ordering of his men.

Finally, when everything was in order and the yacht was steaming steadily on her way, and the captain had exhausted his vocabulary of "cuss-words" several times, Longdale spoke to him.

"That was a nice fiasco, wasn't it?" he growled.

"It was a warm climate of a failure, if that's what you mean," the captain snarled back at him.

"And that's just what I did mean. What puzzles me is, how the detectives and the police got onto the racket. That is something I can't understand."

"And what puzzles me is, what to do with you," the captain rejoined.

"What to do with me?"

"Yes."

"What do you mean?"

"Just what I said; what to do with you. You don't want to be aboard this craft without the woman, and I don't want you aboard, either."

"What are you going to do about it?"

"I was thinking about touching somewhere and inviting you to step ashore."

"That isn't to be thought of. I was seen there on the dock, and the woman and her lover will know I was at the bottom of the matter."

"But, you have got no business here, and I don't want you, either, so, what is going to be done with you?"

"There is only one thing for me to do, and that is take a prolonged vacation in some distant land till this affair blows over, when I'll return, and woe to Conrad Cunningham then!"

"What will you do with him?"

"I'll speak no threats, but I'll marry his widow, sooner or later, or know the reason why."

"You'll take her second-handed, eh, if you can't have her brand new; ha, ha, ha!"

"Curse you! do you want me to knock you down?"

"Don't try it, for your own sake."

"Then don't make merry over a serious matter. I have told you enough of this affair for you to have a full understanding of it. I love the woman, yet she has disgraced me by choosing that miserable hunchback instead of me. Think of it! It is more than flesh and blood can stand."

"And yet you'll have to grin and bear it all the same."

"Yes, till the time comes when I can have sweet revenge. No, you can't put me ashore, Captain Trucker; I must go with you."

"Well, as I was going to take you anyhow, as it was planned, I suppose I can do it, but you have got to swear you'll never reveal anything you may find out, same as I intended making you do."

"I can readily take that pledge, I guess."

"But, will you keep it?"

"Yes, I will."

"All right, then, you can remain aboard. Let's go to the cabin for a talk over the situation."

The captain led the way down into the cabin, where the pair took seats at the table.

"Now, Longdale," he proceeded to explain, "I have got hold of the biggest thing on ice, a mystery, or secret, that has been buried for forty years, and I'm going now to bury it a good deal deeper."

"What are you talking about?"

"I'm talking about the object of this voyage, of course. It was one Conrad Cunningham was going to make, but I got the secret away from him and now he will have to whistle for it, I'm telling you."

"What is it?"

"That's telling—or rather, not to be told."

"Still, if you are going to take me with you, you can't expect to keep me ignorant of it."

"I know that; part of it you are bound to know, if you go with me, but the rest you can never know unless I see fit to tell you; and that is what I want to talk about."

"Talk away, then."

"You have sworn not to give me away, but that's not saying you wouldn't, when you got safe ashore and it suited your purpose—"

"No, no; I mean—"

"Never mind telling me, I know you well enough. The thing is just here: I can put in your hands the very choicest bit of revenge you could possibly have against this man Cunningham."

"What the deuce do you mean, anyhow? What are you coming at?"

"It is something which, if known to this sweet young thing he is going to marry, would probably turn her against him for all time, and might throw the field open to you—"

"Then why in the name of wouders didn't you tell me before? I would have given you five thousand dollars, willingly, for such a hold on him."

"We don't think of things till too late, sometimes, and you had your own plan all laid out, you remember."

"Yes, that's true; but, tell me now, and don't delay another minute."

"That is just the point, now. I will tell you, and then you'll be that much under obligation to me, and will owe me a favor in return."

Followed then a talk at some length in low tones, at the end of which Elson Longdale sprung to his feet, his face beaming, and grasping the hand of Captain Trucker he gave it a hearty shaking. What he had learned was greatly to his delight.

CHAPTER XI.

FIRST AT THE ISLAND.

BILLY JUNIOR slept soundly all night, except that he had some unusual dreams of a strange nature.

Used as he was to sleeping anywhere, with the noises of a great city's streets hanging and buzzing around him, it was no trouble for him to sleep in his new and strange quarters in spite of the sounds there.

His dreams were chiefly about water. He saw a new kind of street sprinklers, for one thing, upon which a man with a dipper half as big as a barrel was dipping the water out of a great tank and throwing it on the ground, and he could plainly hear it splash when it fell.

Then he dreamed of riding in a carriage set with springs so flexible that it was almost like swinging in a hammock. At first he thought the sensation delightful, but finally it began to be disagreeable, and at last he found he would have to get out or he was going to be sick. He called to the driver to stop, but the more he called the more furiously the carriage was hurried, and finally he awoke.

The motion was real enough, he found, but he was in anything but a soft-sprung carriage.

It was some moments before he could realize where he was, or what was the matter, but it soon all came back to him and he knew the yacht was at sea.

The little engine was clanking away at a lively rate, fairly spinning occasionally when the screw lifted out of the water for a moment, and the water was splashing and dashing furiously.

It was now daylight, and light found its way down into the hold here and there where an opening permitted, and Billy Junior could see the kind of place he was in. It might have been worse, he realized quickly. There were some water-casks, and a great quantity of packed provisions.

The young Arab got up on his feet, or tried to, but he was thrown down before he had made a success of it, and it was then he realized that he was deathly seasick.

He had been on the point of commenting upon his situation in his droll way, but all nonsense was taken out of him now.

And while he was thinking only how miserably sick he felt, the hatch above was opened.

"Hello!" exclaimed a voice. "Blow me if here ain't a stowaway!"

It was Tom Sand who made the discovery.

Others quickly ran to the spot, and when Billy Junior looked up several faces were over the open hatch looking down at him.

"It's a New York bootblack, sure's you're born!" cried Jack Roper, and as he spoke in his natural voice Billy Junior recognized him at once as his patron.

"I'll bootblack him!" next thundered the tones of Captain Trucker. "Fish the rat up here, and I'll throw him overboard!"

"How did you come there, sonny?" demanded Jack Roper.

"I was put down here and locked in," the Arab answered. "A big Irishman on the dock done it."

The little Arab was so sick he could hardly hold his head up, and as he just then had to render his account to Father Neptune, the sailors had a good laugh at his expense.

One of the sailors descended into the hold, and the boy was taken out and laid on the deck, unable to hold up his head.

"Seems like a shame to throw him over, if he has told the truth, don't it, mates?" observed Jack Roper, loud enough for Captain Trucker to overhear. "He couldn't help it."

"Yes, that's so," agreed Mark Welch.

"Well, ye needn't do it," the captain relented, and perhaps he would not have done it, anyhow. "We'll make him useful when he gets his sea legs."

"I'll put the little bunch o' rags in my bunk, if the rest of ye don't want him," suggested Billy—or Jack Roper. "He 'minds

me of a little chip of a brother I had once, and I kind o' cotton to him."

"You're welcome to him," said Tom Sand. "He don't mind me of any of my kin, I'm glad to say."

The others laughed, while Billy took his namesake up and carried him away.

"I know you're too sick to talk now, Billy Junior," he said to him gently, "so don't try to. I won't ask you any questions. There's plenty of time for that. You will get over this in a few days at most. Only remember this: You are not to let out that you ever saw me before, and you must say your name is Chips. That's all for now; just lie here and be quiet."

Billy Junior showed that he understood, but was too ill to do more, and so Broadway Billy left him.

Three days after that Chips was on deck all right.

Captain Trucker made him a sort of handy monkey about the yacht, and gave him a sharp taste of a rope's end the first day.

Jack Roper did not pay any attention to that accident, and took but very little notice of Chips anyhow, but finally he found a good opportunity for a quiet chat with him.

"What made you stow away here, Ticket?" he asked.

"I didn't, boss," the truthful answer. "It was just as I said." And he gave the facts of the case.

"Well," said Billy, when he had heard all, "you evidently would have stowed away if you hadn't been imprisoned, so it's all the same, and here you are. You may be useful yet, before we get done, for there is fun ahead, I'm thinking. Play well your part, and work yourself into the captain's good will all you can."

The weather was for the most part good, and everything went well on board the yacht, and the days came and went, for the voyage was by no means a short one.

Captain Trucker and Elson Longdale had come to be very intimate, and spent a good share of their time playing at cards in the cabin.

And so passed the time until finally their voyage came to an end, and they dropped anchor in an apology for a harbor beside a barren, desolate and forbidding island.

"Well, where are we at, anyhow?" demanded Chips, in his manner inimitable.

He put the question to no less a personage than the captain himself, with whom he had come to be on familiar terms by this time.

The boy was witty, full of jokes, and could sing any number of comic songs to perfection, and all in all had served to liven the voyage not a little, and he stood well in Trucker's good graces.

The captain named the island, in answer, and turned to speak to Longdale, who just then appeared.

"It's a hard-looking spot," the Stowaway commented. "Guess there don't nobody live here. I wouldn't like to play Robinson Crusoe on that island, you bet."

With that he was quiet, taking in what the captain and Longdale had to say to each other.

"This is the place, Longdale," the captain spoke first.

"This is the island, eh? It looks like the right kind of a place for such a purpose."

"You are right. Now, if I only had those papers I might be able to do the work in a day and get away before the other party could possibly get here."

"Too bad you had to lose them."

"I never lost them; they were stolen from me, I'm sure of that."

"Small difference. But, how much can you remember of the directions they contained?"

"Mighty little. It began by saying the seeker had to range the highest two crags, looking from the south, and proceed on the

line, keeping to the right, for a certain specified distance."

"And you have forgotten the distance?"

"Yes, curse the luck. I did not try to fix it in mind, having the papers in my possession."

"And after that what was to follow?"

"Why, turn to the right and walk due east to a stone marked X on one side, and after that it was a regular puzzle of paces and directions till the right spot was arrived at."

"And how were you to know the right spot when you found it?"

"Only by its location from the stone marked X on one side, and the fact that a stone would turn when pried in a certain manner and reveal a cavity underneath."

"Then there is only one thing to be done, and that is, to search the whole island, in that neighborhood and test every stone on every side till we come to the right one. Something of a task."

"And likely to take us a month to accomplish."

"That's true."

Both were silent and thoughtful for a time.

Billy Junior was taking it all in, Broadway Billy leaving it all to him, having his duties to perform.

It was forenoon when the yacht entered the harbor, and when everything had been made shipshape, and the midday mess had been served, the captain announced his intention of going on shore.

The small boat was lowered and a couple of sailors were chosen to row, one of whom happened to be Jack Roper.

These got down to their places, and the captain followed, succeeded in turn by Longdale.

"Can't I go too, boss?" sung out the Arab. "I'm dyin' to git my feet on the ground once more to see how it will feel. I'll dance a double shuffle for you if you'll let me go."

"Well, tumble in with you; I don't care."

And Chips tumbled accordingly, with all alacrity.

Trucker steered the boat, and watching the higher points of the island, landed in what he considered the proper place of beginning.

Pulling the boat up on the beach, and leaving Chips to watch her, the others made their way up the rocks, guided by the captain, who followed the directions of the lost papers as closely as he could remember.

It was not an easy climb, but finally a comparative level was reached, and there things had the appearance of having never been finished. All was one ragged mass of rock; all sorts and sizes of blocks and slivers were on every hand. There was simply nothing else.

"We may as well give it up," remarked Longdale, at the first look he took around.

"Not by a good deal," said Trucker, doggedly. "We'll find it if we have to spend a whole year here. Wealth untold is within a stone's throw of us, and we must have it."

He directed, then, that every effort should be made to find the rock marked on one side, and when that was discovered a circle of search could be marked around it; but, though they hunted till nearly dark, that particular stone was not discovered, and they returned to the yacht discouraged.

CHAPTER XII.

BEGINNING THE STRUGGLE.

In the meanwhile the steam yacht Peer had not been losing any time, and on the morning following the arrival of the Gauntlet she steamed into the same harbor.

The hunchback was on deck with Captain Elliott, eager to get on shore as soon as possible, and it was he who first espied the Gauntlet riding at anchor in the comparatively smooth water.

"Ha! there is the Gauntlet!" he cried, at sight of her.

"True enough, agreed the captain, looking where Conningham indicated.

"And the question is, are we too late?"

"Impossible for me to answer it, sir, but at a guess I venture to say we are not."

"You give me hope; but, on what do you base your supposition?"

"If they had gained what they came for they would probably not be here yet, I reason."

"That is true, unless they intended sailing to-day."

"Do you want to run near enough to hail them?"

"No, that is useless, and I do not care to anchor within rifle-shot of them, either. I hold that my life would not be safe if we did."

"Then we'll beat to the east and take that side of the bay, so to call it."

The course was laid accordingly, and in due time the Peer, too, was riding at anchor.

On board the Gauntlet the first to discover the new-comer was Chips, and he immediately called the attention of the captain to her.

Captain Trucker's first proceeding was to swear roundly, and while he was so engaged Elson Longdale came up from the cabin, suspecting what was wrong and wanting to see for himself.

"What do you think of that?" roared Trucker, pointing.

"It proves they have not been far behind us all the way, that's sure. What is going to be done?"

"If I had a cannon I'd sink 'em, I swear I would! It's going to be a fight for the treasure, now, and the best side wins. We'll cheat them yet, somehow."

"Certainly, we must do that; but, how?"

"We must lay a plan."

"Do you think they have your lost papers, and so can find the treasure without trouble?"

"I don't see how they can have them; and yet it is possible, for I have no idea who took them out of my pocket. We'll let them make the first move."

As soon as the Peer was at anchor, the hunchback called the captain into the cabin for a consultation.

"Captain Elliott," he said, "circumstances force me to change my plan with regard to this secret voyage. You know I told you you were never to know what the secret was."

"Yes, Mr. Conningham."

"Well, that was hardly the truth, for I knew I would have to depend on you to get the treasure aboard—"

"Treasure?"

"A sum that would almost make Monte Cristo envious, sir."

"Suspicion pointed that way, sir, but I hardly thought it possible that such could be the case."

"I intended letting you into this much of the matter, upon our arrival here, Captain Elliott, but that is all I can ever tell you. Where this treasure came from, and how it has fallen to me, are points which I can never reveal to any living soul. I trust you will never ask me."

The captain bowed his head.

"But now the crew, as things are, cannot help learning something. We may be compelled to fight for the treasure, and if so, we shall need their help. If it comes to that, I must buy their silence, as I have bought your own. You see how I am placed, and that I can do nothing else. But, without the papers, how are we to find it? I cannot remember the directions."

"Our chances will be as good as theirs."

"True; but if we go ashore to search, they will follow and spy upon us, and if they take the lead, we must do the same."

"Then there is no use holding back for them to move first, and the finder will have to be prepared to fight for his rights."

"I lower the boat at once if you so direct."

"Yes, do so, and you and I together will go on shore."

"It shall be done, sir."

They went to the deck, and in a short time were in the small boat and pulling from the yacht.

This move was seen by those aboard the Gauntlet immediately, and Captain Trucker manned his own boat and headed for the shore, seeing which, Captain Elliott stopped.

"They are two to one against us," he said. "Will it be prudent for us to put ourselves in their way?"

"It will not," decided the hunchback, promptly. "Pull back again and take in two of the crew, and we will also arm ourselves."

The boat was turned and headed for the yacht, and seeing this, the other boat stopped.

There was a consultation, evidently, for it stood still for some minutes, and at last, when the other had about reached the Peer, this, too, pulled in the same direction.

When it came near Captain Trucker hailed:

"Ahoy! the Peer?"

"What is wanted?" demanded Captain Elliott.

"We want to talk with Conrad Cunningham."

"Tell them to pull nearer and I will talk with them," the hunchback directed.

This was shouted back to those in the boat, and immediately they pulled about a cable's length nearer and again rested their oars.

"What do you want?" the hunchback himself now asked.

Elson Longdale stood up to answer him.

"We want you to leave here at once, for one thing," he announced.

"And we refuse to do it."

"It will be worse for you if you do not."

"We are prepared to take all the chances of that, Sir Rascal."

"Have a care, Conrad Cunningham. I know your secret, sir, and a word from me will bring you low."

The face of the hunchback paled, spite of his efforts against it.

"I defy you," he cried. "You may think you know something, but I do not believe you. Be that as it may, we do not intend being frightened away from here by you or any one else."

"The captain of the Gauntlet bids me speak for him."

"Well?"

"He warns you that no good can come of your remaining here; that you shall never carry away what you have come for; that unless you heed his warning you may never sail out of this harbor."

"We defy him, and you, and all of you."

"You do, eh? Well, hear me for myself, then: Go away, Conrad Cunningham and I will keep your secret; remain, and I will publish it broadcast, and the woman you love will then despise you—"

"Knave and coward!" the hunchback cried out, interrupting. "You are false to the core! Your oath would not be accepted by me for the simplest fact, and your promises are light as air. Go! and do your worst. I defy you. If it is to be a fight, we will fight it to the end."

"So be it," thundered Captain Trucker, and Longdale sitting down, they pulled away, heading now for the Gauntlet.

"Shall we go to the island?" Captain Elliott asked.

"Had we not better let them move first, now?" questioned the hunchback. "We know they have discovered nothing."

"It might be just as well to remain idle the rest of the day, and maybe by to-morrow we will have thought of some plan of action that will give us the advantage."

So it was decided, and the small boat was pulled up on deck again as a measure of precaution.

No one from either yacht went on shore that day, and night came on.

On board the Peer a strict watch was ordered.

Nothing happened during the night, but at an early hour next morning the boat of the Gauntlet was seen to put in to the shore, loaded with six men, and it was plain they meant to search.

Their boat landed, two men remained in charge of it, and the other four ascended the rocks and disappeared from view.

Captain Elliott and the hunchback were consulting what was best to be done, when a small voice hailed the Peer.

All who heard it looked wonderingly about, but nothing was discovered until the hail was heard again, seeming to come this time from somewhere under the stern of the yacht.

Looking, Captain Elliott discovered there a boy, swimming.

"Hello!" he called. "Where did you come from?"

"I have deserted the other yacht," the answer.

"Will you take me aboard?"

"You have deserted? What was that for? Here, catch hold, and we'll take you up and hear what you have to say."

He threw a rope, and Billy Junior caught it and was pulled up to the deck.

The distance between the two yachts was not a short one, but the Arab did not appear to be greatly fatigued.

There he stood, dripping, his bare skin shining here and there through the holes in his ragged garments, and while he smiled upon all around him he drew a sheet of cork from under his jacket.

"Tell us, why have you deserted?" the captain again questioned.

"'Cause they're a bad lot over there, and 'cause I had somethin' to tell the owner of this yacht."

"I am the owner," spoke up the hunchback.

"What have you to tell me? If I can trust you, you shall have our protection, my boy."

"Well, sir, there is a plot to kill you and not let you ever get back to New York alive. I wanted to tell you to look out for that, 'cause I don't like murder, nohow."

"A plot to kill me, eh?"

"Yes; then that rival of yours will go back and marry the gal what's sweet on you, and they'll live happy ever after, and all the rest of it, you know. They talk about sinkin' this yacht to-night, if they kin do it, and I thought you'd ought ter know about it; that was all, sir."

Needless to say, Billy Junior was warmly welcomed aboard the Peer.

CHAPTER XIII.

TRYING A MURDEROUS SCHEME.

THE remainder of that day was passed quietly on board the Peer.

Before night the boat of the Gauntlet returned to that yacht, but it brought nothing, as those on the Peer could plainly see by watching through the glass.

Night came on and settled down, and on board the Peer the whole crew was kept on deck. Some were allowed to nap while others watched, but all were ready at a moment's call to defend their yacht.

It was after midnight when the boat from the Gauntlet was espied drawing near as silently as a shadow, and as silent remained those on the Peer.

The boat was allowed to come within pistol range, when Captain Elliott thundered a challenge:

"Ahoy, there, the boat!" he cried.

The rowers, whose oars were muffled, ceased their gentle pulling, and seeing that further caution was useless, no further effort at silence was made, but the voice of Captain Trucker came back in response:

"Have you seen anything of a deserter from the Gauntlet?" he demanded.

"We have no men aboard here but our own," the return.

"But, this deserter was a boy."

"Have you just missed him?"

"We have just come to see if he is here, no matter when we missed him."

"And a strange manner of approach you made of it, I must say. What need to come here with muffled oars?"

"That is our business. Have you seen the boy?"

"Well, it was a poor business, and I warn you to get yourselves off out of rifle range just as quickly as you can or we'll open fire on you."

There was some low talking aboard the boat for a moment, when the rowers plied their oars with a will and the boat disappeared in the darkness off in the direction of the Gauntlet.

"What do you suppose was their intention?" asked the hunchback.

"I don't know," answered the captain, "unless they meant to blow us up. We shall have to watch them every minute."

Vigilance was not relaxed all night, but nothing more was seen of the boat, and morning dawned clear and bright. The boy Chips had undoubtedly saved the Peer.

It was not to be supposed for a moment that

Billy Junior had left the Gauntlet without being directed by Broadway Billy, nor without having a thorough understanding with him concerning some plan of action in which they were to act in concert.

At an early hour again the boat put off from the Gauntlet, with six men as before, two remaining in charge of the boat when it landed.

Broadway Billy was one of the four who climbed the rocks in search of the hidden treasure.

He had made a careful study of the papers in his possession.

Having committed to memory the directions given in the documents, he began his part of the search in a systematic manner without the appearance of so doing, and in due time was rewarded.

The discovery he made was that of the rock bearing the X on one side.

Saying nothing, he continued, seemingly in an idle manner, following the directions exactly.

The end brought him to a stone that had been examined forty times at the very least since the search had begun, the least suspicious-looking of any that lay around.

Remembering the minute directions given, Billy applied the test, taking a moment when no one was looking his way, and to his delight he found that the great stone could be moved easily in that one particular manner.

It was a secret that might be found out, but the chances were all against its being discovered without the key as a guide.

Leaving the spot immediately, he searched elsewhere as diligently as the rest.

And so this day passed like the other.

On board the Peer no move had been made to discover the treasure. They were sadly handicapped there, and could not act as freely as could the pirates on the Gauntlet.

Pirates they were, and nothing short of it, for had they not stolen the yacht they were holding?

Those on the Peer scarcely dared leave their craft, fearful that she would be blown up if they did so, a thought which did not trouble those of the Gauntlet, as they knew, or at any rate thought, the owner would not care to destroy his property so recklessly.

Another night of vigilance, and on the following morning Mr. Cunningham said to Captain Elliott that something had got to be done; desperate means must be used if no other availed.

"I have a plan," said the captain, immediately. "I have been thinking, even while following your policy of patience. When they go ashore to-day we will capture the Gauntlet, take prisoners the few men on her, and anchor right beside her and refuse to let them come on board again."

"And what then?"

"Starve them into submission."

"Your plan is a good one, and rough as the measure is, we'll undertake it."

"Everything is fair in war, and this is war on a small scale, sir. Have they not stolen your yacht?"

"And came here to blow us up, perhaps. You are right, Captain Elliott, and no mercy can be shown them. We will undertake the plan, and make them prisoners when they surrender."

Everything was arranged for the carrying out of the scheme. Steam was gotten up quietly, and they waited for the search party to leave the Gauntlet and go on shore, when they would steam over alongside the other yacht and take possession of her. But, they waited in vain.

All that day not a soul left the Gauntlet.

"What do you make of it?" asked the hunchback, as the day waned.

"I believe they have a scheme in mind similar to our own," Captain Elliott answered.

"If so, they are not likely to hold out, for their eagerness to find the hidden treasure will not allow them to do so, unless they suspect what we purpose doing."

"That is just it. They may have come to their senses respecting the danger they have been running, and I'm sorry I did not urge this thing upon you before. We could have made the capture yesterday, easily."

"You are right: we have made a mistake."

Late in the afternoon men were seen to be at work on the bow of the Gauntlet, and the glass revealed the fact that they were putting a peculiar outrigger in place.

"What do you suppose they are up to?" asked the hunchback.

"I hardly know," his captain answered, "but I consider it fortunate that we are under steam."

"I bet I know what they are goin' to do, sir," here put in Chips.

"You think so?"

"Yes, sir; I bet they are goin' to rig a fender out there and steam over here and plunk a hole in us."

"How did you guess that?" demanded the captain. "That is precisely what they are going to do, Mr. Cunningham, turning to the yacht-owner. "How did you guess it, my boy?"

"I didn't guess it, sir; I heard it talked about before I left."

"You should have told us before. But, then, you did tell us their intention of sinking us. We are prepared for them."

Buoys were attached to the anchor cables, and everything was made ready to slip them at a moment's notice, and that done, the Peer patiently awaited the coming of the attack.

Things had not worked to suit the plans arranged between Broadway Billy and Billy Junior.

Needless to dwell upon them, since they were of no avail.

The work on the Gauntlet was presently finished, and all remained quiet till nearly dark, when she was seen bearing down upon the Peer under full steam.

Captain Elliott took the wheel, gave his orders quietly, and as the Gauntlet drew near the Peer suddenly took life and glided out of her way in the very neatest manner imaginable, her crew sending up a yell of defiance.

"We'll have you yet," roared Captain Trucker.

"You will not find us asleep, anyhow," retorted Captain Elliott.

The Gauntlet had veered, seeing the Peer about to escape her, determined to strike if possible, and when she passed astern there was not much room to spare between the two yachts.

The Peer stopped at once, and backed to her former position, ready to escape another attack in the same manner if one was made.

About this time a dripping form appeared upon the deck, a sailor who certainly was not one of her crew.

No one noticed him till he appeared before Captain Elliott at the wheel.

"Do I address the captain of this yacht, sir?" he asked.

"Who the deuce are you?" the surprised captain demanded. "Yes, I'm captain of this craft."

"And I'm a deserter from the Gauntlet. I want to see you and the owner of this yacht privately. I have something to disclose to you."

"What's your name? How do I know but there is a trick in this?"

"My name is Jack Roper, sir. Is that boy Chips with you? If he is, ask him who his friend was on the Gauntlet."

Chips was right there, by this time.

"Hello, Jack!" he cried, rushing up and grasping Billy's hand. "I know him, Cap'n Elliott; he was the only one of the Gauntlet that stood by me; only for him they would throwed me overboard."

"But, sir, what do you want?" the captain asked.

"I have told you, sir."

"You come to us as a friend?"

"I do."

"Then why did you not come sooner and warn us of what the Gauntlet was going to do?"

"I had a plan to save you."

"Nothing could have saved us, had we not been under steam."

"I knew you were under steam, and you mistake, sir. I stood near the wheel, and it was my intention to knock down the captain and change the course of the yacht and miss you, and leap overboard; but when I saw you moving out of the way, that was needless, so I dropped quietly over the stern as we passed, and here I am. Had I carried out my plan, that would have been my letter of introduction. You see I have on a cork jacket, proof that I did not leap into the water unprepared for a long, hard swim if necessary, sir."

"And I have no proof that you are not here to scuttle us. Can you satisfied us on that point?"

"I can, sir, if you will grant me the interview I seek."

CHAPTER XIV.

SECURING THE TREASURE.

THE hunchback owner joined them in time to hear the last few remarks, and he now put a question.

"What do you know of the intention of those on the Gauntlet?" he asked. "Do they mean to run us down if they can do it?"

"Their action is proof enough for it, sir. They will try it again immediately. My plan would be to put out to sea a little distance, and so be out of their reach for the time being."

"Play the coward, eh?" cried Captain Elliott.

"Can you dodge them, sir, if they attack again?"

"That is what I purpose risking, anyhow."

"There is risk in it, and I told you we could not afford to take risks, Captain Elliott," reminded the hunchback. "Stand out to sea for a little way, until we have heard this young man's story, at least."

"That is different, sir; your order shall be obeyed."

The Gauntlet had turned, and was now bearing down again, but the Peer started and glided gracefully out of the little bay to the broad, blue water beyond.

It was, as said, about night.

The Gauntlet did not give chase, and when they were safely outside the captain of the Peer put another man at the wheel and he and the hunchback took the new arrival down into the cabin.

"Now, my man, what have you to say?" Cunningham demanded.

"I have made a discovery, sir."

"And what is it?"

"The captain of the Gauntlet, and his friend, with some of us sailors, have been hunting for a treasure on the island, sir."

"Ha!"

"And I, sir, have found it."

"What! Do you mean to say you have found a hidden treasure there?"

"I have, sir, and I have not mentioned it to a soul. From their talk, I know you are the rightful claimant, and I have come to put it into your hands."

The hunchback and his captain looked at each other, and then at the sailor who had brought such an important bit of news. Was it a trick? And if so, what was its hidden significance?

"Do you mean this?" the captain asked.

"I stand ready to prove it, sir."

"How?"

"By putting you in possession of the treasure this very night."

"You cannot do that, I know," disputed the hunchback. "It would be hard enough to find the place by daylight."

"I have already found it, though, sir, and have so fixed it in my mind that I could find it by night without the necessity of much search. Are you willing to hear my plan?"

"Let's hear it," the captain invited.

"Well, it is this: On the other side of this island is another harbor, not so large or so good as this, but still good enough for the purpose. I have noticed it from the top of the rocks. We can steam around and enter that, and from that side secure the treasure and have it all on board before daylight."

"And what then?" asked the hunchback.

"Whatever you please, sir. All I ask is the privilege of passage back to New York with you."

"Your language does not appear to be that of a common sailor."

"A common sailor is what I am, now, sir, nevertheless."

"And what if we do not agree to your plan?"

asked the captain. "Suppose you play us false? Suppose you have a trap laid for us in this other harbor of which you speak?"

"I can say nothing more, sir; if you do not care to believe me and act upon my suggestion, do not."

"And what will you do in that case?"

"Keep the secret I hold."

"Then you would not reveal it to those on the other yacht?"

"I would not. Once let it be found, and there will be a fight to the death among them."

"Captain Elliott, what shall we do?" the hunchback appealed to his captain. "If this young man tells the truth, it is our chance."

"There is only one way to learn whether he is true or false," the captain responded, "and that is to put it to the test. If you say so, we will sail around to that harbor and see."

"Do it."

The course of the yacht was laid accordingly, and in due time she entered another and smaller harbor on the south side of the little island.

Broadway Billy stood by the captain at the wheel, as did the hunchback also, but Billy offered no suggestions, merely replying to ques-

tions asked him. He had to guard severely against arousing suspicion against himself.

Finally the anchor was dropped, and there being no lights aboard the yacht, she was invisible from the shore in the darkness.

"Now, what do you propose, Jack Roper?" Captain Elliott asked.

"I propose nothing, sir," the prompt answer. "My part is to guide to the spot one man or many men, just as you please; that part of it is nothing to me."

"Is it further from here than from the other harbor?"

"Yes, a considerable distance further."

"Ought we to take lights?"

"By no means, sir; they would be seen by the Gauntlet, and there would be an attack before the work could be finished."

"Mr. Cunningham," and the captain turned to the owner, "I am satisfied with this young man's honest intention. How many men shall we send with him? Or who shall go?"

"What is your opinion?"

"I consider the yacht perfectly safe here, and would suggest taking all our men save two, whom we will leave on guard. The idea of keeping the matter secret is no longer to be thought of. Let the main thing be to get the treasure safely on board."

"So be it."

The boat was lowered, and all save two of the yacht's company, excepting Chips, crowded into it and pulled away for the shore.

"Now," said Jack Roper, when they had landed, "I would say leave one man here with the boat, so that we cannot miss her on our return, and all the rest go for the treasure."

"This will be a wise move," agreed the captain.

"And as I have never been here before," Billy went on to say, "I do not pretend to act as guide until we come to the place where I can assume that role. The general direction is there," pointing, "but we may have to take a round-about course to get to the place."

A brief discussion, and they set forward, and after something more than an hour and a half of pretty severe traveling, arrived on ground that was familiar to the disguised detective.

"Here we are!" he cried. "Now I know where I am, and can guide you to the spot in a few minutes."

And he did.

He went to the stone which he had fixed so well in mind, and when the others had gathered around him, rolled it over and disclosed a dark hole beneath.

"Now we will need light, surely," remarked the hunchback, excitedly.

"I am prepared for the emergency," said Billy. "I have a number of pieces of candles in my pocket; who has a match?"

Several had matches, and after a little trying, the candles having been wet, one was lighted, and holding it down in the hole, Billy took a survey of the interior, as did as many more as could crowd around.

It was several feet in depth, and extended toward the north in something of a miniature cavern further than could be seen from the opening.

Rope had been brought, and this was now brought into use.

One by one they descended, Billy first, then Captain Elliott, and then the hunchback and one other, the rest remaining without.

The cavern was found to be smaller than they had thought at first. It was not more than twenty feet in length. At the further end were piled some heavy, brass-bound boxes, each with handles.

"It is here, it is here!" cried the hunchback, excitedly.

"Are your men to be trusted thoroughly?" Billy asked.

"I think so, sir."

"There will be a great temptation, once this is on board the yacht."

This was spoken in whisper, almost.

"Then what do you advise?"

"Let them all come down and see, and promise them a liberal reward if they remain faithful and serve you well."

It was done, and as soon as that was over the work of taking the cases out of the hole began, and no stop was made till it had been accomplished.

There were nine of the boxes in all, about of the same weight, and heavy enough they were, too; and when the last had been taken out the men in the hole climbed out to the surface.

"May I offer one suggestion more?" asked Broadway Billy.

"Certainly, sir," answered the hunchback. "We know now we can trust you, so say on."

"I would suggest leaving a note here, by this open cavern, letting Captain Trucker and his friend know you have foiled them and taken the treasure out from under their noses."

"Excellent!" cried the hunchback and the captain together.

Such a message was written, by light of the candle, and left conspicuously exposed to view.

The light was then put out, care having been taken that it should not be seen from the harbor, and dividing the boxes, then, according to the strength of the men who had to carry them, they set out to return to the boat.

Slow progress was made, and they were more than two hours in reaching the shore.

They arrived in safety, however, at last, and without accident.

A part of the men went out to the yacht first, with some of the treasure, one man then returning with the boat and the rest following with the remainder of the boxes they had found.

A consultation was held, in which Jack Roper was allowed to have a voice, and the yacht stood out to sea, intending to return to the harbor on the other side of the island next morning as though they had been sailing around all night. Another act in the drama was to be undertaken.

CHAPTER XV.

AMAZING SURPRISE.

MEANWHILE, what of matters aboard the Gauntlet.

There was disappointment when, upon wearing around to descend upon the Peer a second time, they saw that yacht steam away in the direction of the breakwater.

"Ha!" cried Captain Trucker, "we have scared them out! They are putting to sea, as sure as you're born, Longdale. It's too accursed bad we couldn't 'a' sunk them."

"You are right it is; but, if they are going for good, we won't kick. Too many's a crowd in this business. I wanted to settle my score with that infernal hunchback, but I will deal with him another time if he is to escape me now. Curse him! he cannot escape me."

There was no mistake about the intention of the Peer; she did put out to sea, as we know, and she was not seen that night.

The sailor, Jack Roper, was not missed until the Gauntlet was again at anchor, after the attack; then he was searched for, but not found, and there was but one conclusion to be arrived at, and that was that he must have fallen overboard and been drowned. There was not a thought that he had deserted.

At daylight the bay was scanned for a sight of the rival yacht, but she was not there, and the company on the Gauntlet greatly rejoiced thereat.

"She's gone, sure enough," cried the rascally Longdale.

"Not to be doubted," agreed the captain. "Now we can leave the yacht and go in search of the treasure without anything to fear."

"And we'll put in a full day of it, too. If that gold is there we must have it, and from what you have told me there can be no doubt of the truth of the story. We have got to find it."

After an early and hearty mess they went ashore, taking food with them, leaving only two men on the yacht and none with the boat where they left it on the beach.

Jack Roper was missed, for he had been the life of the party on other occasions, and his fate was much regretted.

So well had Billy played his part that there was never a suspicion.

The searchers went up the rocks to the same general neighborhood where search had been made on the other occasions.

From what Captain Trucker could remember of the papers he had read, he knew this to be the place where the treasure was hid, and this time he was destined to make a discovery he little looked for.

They had been there an hour, maybe, when a shout from one of the sailors drew all attention to him.

Captain Trucker and the others ran quickly to learn what he had found.

"What is it?" the captain eagerly asked.

The man only stood and pointed to the open cavern, and at a sheet of paper which lay on top of the rock, held in place by small stones.

"They have beat us!" the sailor declared. "They have been here in the night and got away with it all!"

"What? What do you say?" cried Longdale, running up.

Captain Trucker could only point at the no-

tice, while he swore at a rate that was perfectly terrific, unable to find words of any other sort to give vent to his rage and disappointment.

The notice was worded thus:

"CREW OF THE GAUNTLET:—

"You are too late. We have been at work while you slept. What you sought is no longer here, but on board the Peer. This is the reward you have well merited."

THE PEER."

"How was it done?" cried Longdale, white with anger at his defeat.

"I believe they have sailed around the island to the other bay," guessed the captain, "and come ashore from there."

"And they must have had the papers."

"Yes, curse them!"

"And have sailed for New York."

"Undoubtedly."

"Can't we overtake them? Can't we run them down and sink them? If we can't have the treasure, we can at least have revenge."

"They have the start of us, and we can't be sure of their course. But, we can try; we'll crowd the time all we can, and if we can come first off Sandy Hook we'll run them down if we hang for it!"

They examined the cavern, finding all the proof they needed and more that the treasure had indeed been there, after which they set out for the beach, every man of them swearing.

Greater reason than this they were soon to have for swearing, could they only have foreseen it.

Meantime the Peer had steamed into the harbor.

Through the glass the situation was revealed to them. The absence of men on the Gauntlet, and the boat lying on the beach, told the story.

"The yacht is ours!" exclaimed Captain Elliott, joyfully. "Now we are masters of the situation. We'll steal the boat from the beach, and then we shall have them at our mercy."

Very quietly they steamed alongside the other yacht, and the two men being asleep, the first they knew of the presence of the Peer in the harbor was when she struck the Gauntlet with a slight shock and made fast to her.

The men of the Peer were upon the deck of the Gauntlet in a moment, and before the two men could make a move they were prisoners.

It had been a speedy and easy victory.

The boat of the Peer was immediately lowered and sent off to the beach to bring the boat belonging to the Gauntlet, and in a very little while that purpose had been accomplished.

"Now we have them," remarked Jack Roper. "They will have to yield themselves prisoners, or stay here on the island."

"But I couldn't leave them here," said Mr. Cunningham.

"It won't be necessary," the rejoinder.

"No, it won't be necessary," agreed Captain Elliott. "They will surrender fast enough when they find we mean business."

When the men from the Gauntlet came down to the beach and took in the situation, their faces blanched to a man.

And well they might, for they were in a desperate situation now, if ever.

Captain Trucker raved and swore in a manner to put away in the shade any previous effort of the kind he had ever undertaken.

"What in blue, bluer and bluest are we going to do now?" he screamed. "They have captured the Gauntlet and have stolen our boat, and here we are, without provisions and with no means of escape!"

When he had exhausted all the shades of blue, he turned to red for further inspiration.

The first outburst over, they looked their situation squarely in the face.

"Longdale, what are we going to do?" Trucker asked.

"I'll be hanged if I know," was the answer.

"We are in a bad box."

"There is only one thing to do, and that is to make the best terms with them we can."

"And the only terms they will offer will be that we surrender unconditionally and come on board as prisoners."

"And that we'll never do! We'll die here first."

"And they'll let us die."

"But, is there nothing we can do? What of the secret we hold? Can't we turn that to account against them?"

"Ha! there is some hope in that. Maybe by promising Cunningham never to mention that, and by giving him my check for the value of the Gauntlet, if we have to do that, he will let us off."

"Good! Try it, anyhow, and see what we can do."

"But once let us get afloat and we'll sink them as sure as the heavens arch above us!"

Captain Trucker having the strongest voice of any, shouted to those on the Peer, but it was some time before he could bring back any response.

Finally it came, in the stentorian tones of Captain Elliott.

"What do you want?" he demanded.

"We want to be taken off," the answer.

"And we have no use for you here, sir."

"Do you mean to leave us to starve?"

"We will take you off on one condition, and one only."

"And what is that?"

"That you surrender unconditionally and come on board the Peer as prisoners."

"What did I tell you?" observed Longdale to Trucker, upon hearing this.

"Never!" Trucker shouted back defiantly.

"We'll stay here and starve before we will go back as prisoners."

"Very well, if that is your choice; we sail out from here at nine o'clock to-morrow morning. Make up your minds between now and that hour. And, if you value your worthless lives, do not attempt to get on board during the night."

There was a hurried consultation between Trucker and Longdale, at the end of which Trucker again shouted.

"We have something to propose," he said.

"Well, be quick about it then," the careless response.

"If you will sell us the Gauntlet, Mr. Longdale will give his check for her value, and we will forever keep secret what we know."

"We will not hear to it! You have heard the only terms we will make you, and we steam out from here to-morrow morning at nine. Be sure you make up your minds before that hour."

It could be seen that men were busy on the two yachts while this was being said, and as Captain Elliott concluded, the anchor of the Gauntlet was lifted.

Steam was then seen from the Peer and slowly the two yachts moved out in the direction of the breakwater, where they finally anchored again, entirely out of hailing distance, and almost, if not quite, out of swimming reach.

"We are in for it, sure," growled Trucker, doggedly.

"Yes, there is only one thing for us to do, and that is to surrender as they propose."

"And if you don't," here spoke up one of the sailors—they had been consulting apart—we'll make you do it. We'll make you prisoners and hand you over. They ain't going to leave us here."

"That will do, sir," thundered Trucker.

"Do you suppose I would run you into such a situation? We'll surrender, since we must, but we'll capture the Peer and her prize before she reaches New York, or we'll die in the attempt. How many of you are in for that, share and share alike?"

It was a proposal which brought forth an immediate cheer of approval.

CHAPTER XVI.

BILLY THE WINNER.

DURING the afternoon those on the yacht saw the men on shore signaling desperately, but no attention was paid to them.

After dark, the treasure was transferred from the Peer to the Gauntlet, where Mr. Cunningham had had secret places arranged for its reception, and he and Captain Elliott demanded to know whether they had made up their minds to accept his terms.

"Yes, we accept your terms," answered Trucker. "There is no chance for men to live on a barren rock like this, and little chance of one being taken off in a hurry, as it is out of the usual way of vessels, so there is nothing else for us to do and we surrender. All we ask is passage on the Peer, and fair treatment until we reach New York."

"Very well; we will take you off, then, and you shall have what you ask for. Two of you walk a quarter of a mile up the beach, and two more a quarter of a mile down, and we'll pull in and take you off in that way. The rest remain where you are until we come back again. We do not intend to allow you any chance for treachery."

This was agreed to and promptly acted upon, and in due time the men were all safely on board the Peer, every one securely bound or manacled.

It was right in accord with their programme, being put on the Peer, for they had every reason to believe the treasure was there, and it was likewise according to the programme of Captain Elliott and the hunchback.

These had a well-founded suspicion of what might be attempted, and it was only good judgment on their part keeping the treasure and the rascals thus far separated at least. The second officer of the Peer was left in command of that yacht, but Jack Roper and Chips were taken on the Gauntlet.

The two yachts were short-handed, and were to keep close company during the voyage. Everything went well until they were eleven days out from the island from which they had started, when a startling thing happened on board the Peer. One of the prisoners had managed to escape, he had liberated all the rest, and of a sudden they captured the yacht!

The first that was known of this on the Gauntlet was when a ringing cheer came rolling across the intervening space, and the prisoners were seen waving their hats, prisoners no longer; while just astern was seen the yacht's boat, with those men who had been handling the Peer now prisoners instead, so far as being bound was concerned.

The Gauntlet turned and picked these up, and seeing the uselessness of chasing the Peer, which was the faster of the two yachts, they continued on their way to port.

Broadway Billy did not make his identity known until the yacht had safely entered, had passed the customs inspectors, and was moored at her dock.

Then he entered the cabin where the owner and the captain were having a final talk.

Billy Junior had been sent on shore upon an important errand.

"What do you want here, sir?" the hunchback demanded, severely. "You have entered without even knocking for permission."

There was something new in the face of this apparently humble sailor, as both men saw at a glance. There was a sternness about the mouth, and his eyes had a glint that was suggestive of purpose and authority.

"I have stepped in, sir, to let you know that I am now in charge of this yacht, and that you are my prisoners," Billy promptly answered, and he drew a revolver as he said it. "Keep your seats, gentlemen, and we will talk it over quietly while we await the coming of the police."

Captain Elliott and the hunchback looked at him in amazement.

"What can you mean?" the hunchback demanded. "Who and what are you, that you dare to take action such as this?"

"My name, sir, is William Weston, better known as Broadway Billy. I sailed on this yacht for the purpose of securing the treasure you have now on board, and of restoring it to its rightful owners."

He displayed his detective's badge.

"Lost! lost!" gasped Conningham, as he sunk back in his chair. "Let me, at least, ask one favor."

"Name it."

"That you will allow Captain Elliott, here, to go free. He has had nothing to do with this matter, further than to manage the yacht for me. Let me pay him what is due him, and do not detain him to fall under disgrace with me."

"I will grant what you ask. Pay him, and let him depart."

"But," the captain protested, "I cannot accept further pay, Mr. Conningham, if it is to be a failure for you after all."

"You shall accept what I promised you, sir. You have done your part and have fully earned it. It has been through no fault of yours that the scheme has miscarried. God knows I meant to be honest in the matter—as honest as I could be and at the same time save my name."

"What was your intention concerning the treasure, sir?" asked Broadway Billy.

"I intended devoting every penny of it to charity, secretly, and by so doing, in some measure make right the great wrong that has been done in the past."

"You mean that?"

"I swear it!"

"Then it is possible that I can yet save your name, for I believe you. I am aware what your character has been, sir; that it has been blameless in the past, and I am satisfied that you have spoken the truth."

"You give me hope. I have spoken only the truth."

"Enough. Pay your captain and let him go."

"Consider me paid, Mr. Conningham."

The captain would not listen to protests, but left the cabin and the yacht, and was seen no more.

"Well, what must I do?" the hunchback asked.

"You must leave this treasure in my hands, together with the papers—"

"I have no papers, sir—"

"But I have; how else could I have found the treasure? Leave these papers in my hands, and I will cut your father's name from them before I give them to the public, and so your honor will be saved."

"I will do it, willingly, gladly. I did not think of that, or I could have done it myself—that is, could have made that my plan. How you came to know about this matter is a mystery; I will not try to penetrate it; only let me go free and save my good name, and I leave it all to you."

"Then, sir, go at once before the police arrive."

The hunchback departed immediately.

In due time Billy Junior returned, bringing with him Harry and Silent Seth, together with some policemen. Billy put the policemen to guard the yacht, he having that authority.

All remained on the Gauntlet, that night, the sailors having been taken away by the hunchback, who bought their secrecy at a liberal price to each, and thus further protected his own name.

Needless to say, Harry and Seth were greatly interested in the story Billy had to tell.

The next morning the Italian consul was sent for, and he came wonderingly on board the yacht to learn what was wanted.

Police officials and reporters were there, together with many others who had interest in the matter, direct and indirect. And when all were assembled, Broadway Billy made known the business for which they had been called.

Forty years prior to the time of our story, a remarkable bank robbery had taken place in Italy. One of the richest banks of that country was completely rifled and its treasure put on board a vessel, openly and in broad daylight, and that vessel cleared and sailed before the truth was guessed.

One of the looters was Abelard Conningham, father of the Conrad Conningham of our story (but names were withheld by Broadway Billy). He, with an officer of the bank, hatched and carried out the scheme. The treasure was to be taken to a certain island and there buried, and the vessel destroyed near enough to some port for the commander to have a chance for escape.

This was done, but the commander (the leading spirit of the scheme, being the official of the bank as mentioned) was injured, and he had barely time to send papers to Conningham before he died.

So the secret became the sole property of Conningham, but he did not dare use it. For two years the detectives of the world were on the alert for the vessel, but she was never heard of after leaving the Italian port.

Conningham was ostensibly a rich merchant, retired, but undoubtedly he had been something worse. His wife, the mother of Conrad, had died early, of a broken heart. Conrad had inherited all of his mother's good qualities, and few or none of his father's bad ones.

At his death, Abelard revealed the secret to his son, giving him full directions in writing how and where to find the hidden treasure. Conrad became eager to recover the treasure, for the purpose he named, and proceeded in the manner we have here shown. Being deformed, and consequently not strong, it was necessary for him to have an able captain in whom he could partly confide, and he had chosen Captain Elliott.

Broadway Billy told his story in detail as far as needful, and the treasure was officially turned over to the Italian Government, Billy eventually receiving a liberal reward.

Conrad Conningham married the lady who had chosen him in preference to his more handsome rival, and Longdale never returned to mar their happiness. The only clew to the fate of the steam yacht Peer, was the finding of a portion of her hull, with the name partly burned, on a Southern beach.

Broadway Billy regretted that his own plans, as arranged with Billy Junior, could not have been carried out; but it really mattered little, as he declared, since they "got there just the same."

Billy Junior was the happiest boy in New York, it may safely be said, and when he reappeared in his old haunts, sun-browned and hearty, his chums wondered where he had been, and listened with delight to the wondrous tale the Stowaway had to unfold to them.

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